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*Washington
Department of*
**FISH and
WILDLIFE**



DISTRICT 11 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Thurston and Pierce counties and GMU 667 of Lewis County

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DISTRICT 11 GENERAL OVERVIEW	1
ELK	3
DEER.....	10
BEAR	14
COUGAR	19
WATERFOWL.....	21
MOURNING DOVE	26
FOREST GROUSE	28
PHEASANT	29
QUAIL.....	30
TURKEY	31
BAND-TAILED PIGEONS	32
COTTONTAIL RABBIT	34

DISTRICT 11 GENERAL OVERVIEW

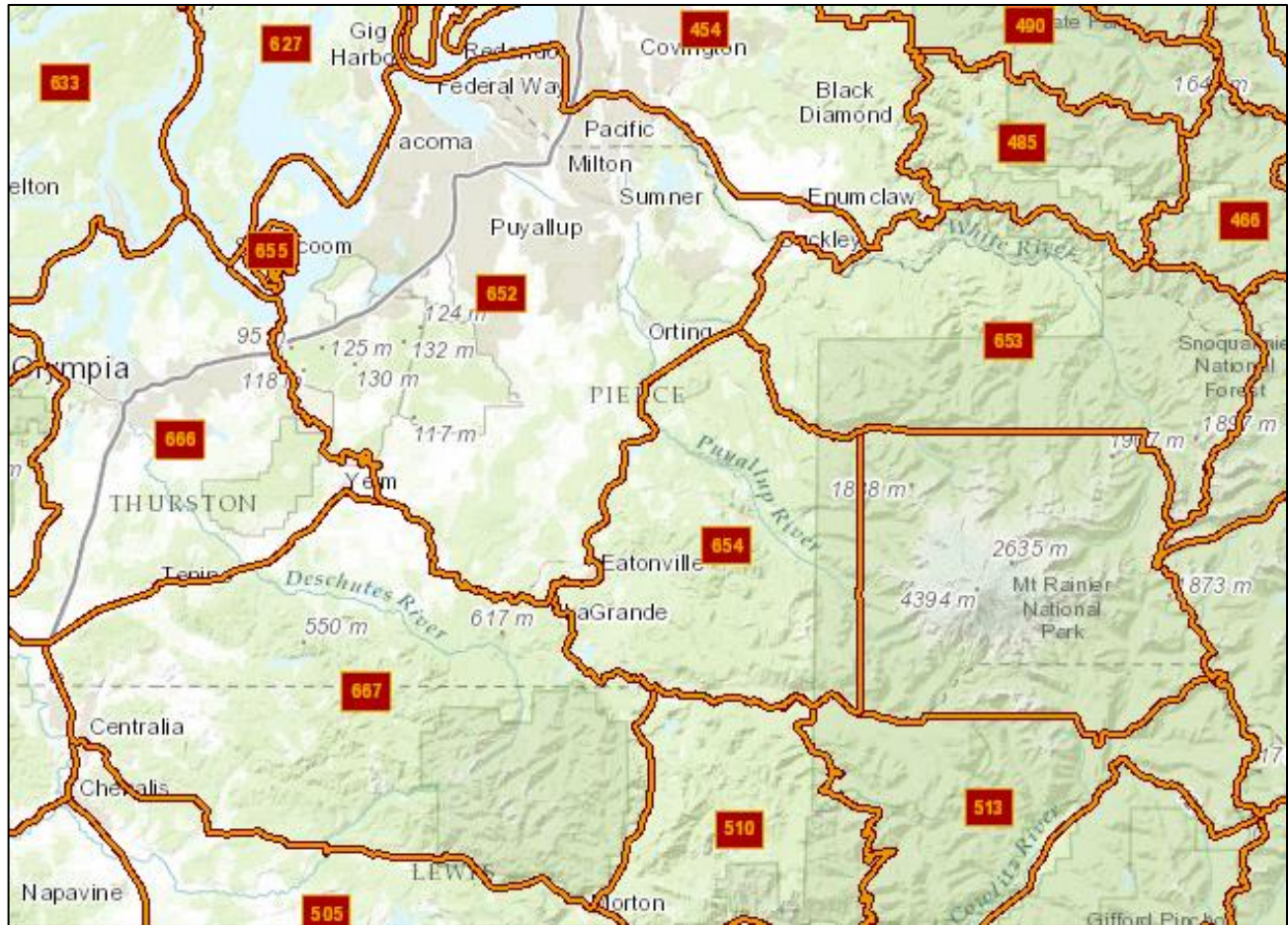
The Game Management Units (GMUs) that comprise District 11 are Puyallup (GMU 652), Anderson Island (GMU 655), White River (GMU 653), Mashel (GMU 654), Deschutes (GMU 666), and Skookumchuck (GMU 667). Land ownership in the District includes private residential and agricultural (e.g. GMUs 652 and 666), and both private and public industrial timber lands (e.g. GMUs 653, 654, and 667). The eastern portion of GMU 653 contains higher-elevation alpine conditions bordering Mount Rainier National Park.

Varied hunting opportunities exist within District 11 and includes waterfowl hunting on Puget Sound waterways, to deer, elk, bear, and cougar hunting on commercial forest land. WDFW's Scatter Creek and West Rocky Prairie Wildlife Areas (GMU 666), Skookumchuck (GMU 667), and the Washington Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) Capitol State Forest (GMU 663), Elbe Hills State Forest (GMU 654), and other DNR forest ownership provide ample opportunity for small and big game hunting on public land that can be accessed free of charge.

Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm in GMU 667, Hancock Timber Resource and Muckleshoot Indian Reservation (managed by Hancock) properties in GMUs 653 and 654 all provide excellent big game opportunities but require the purchase of access permits to enter (obtained through those respective companies – see further information under Deer).

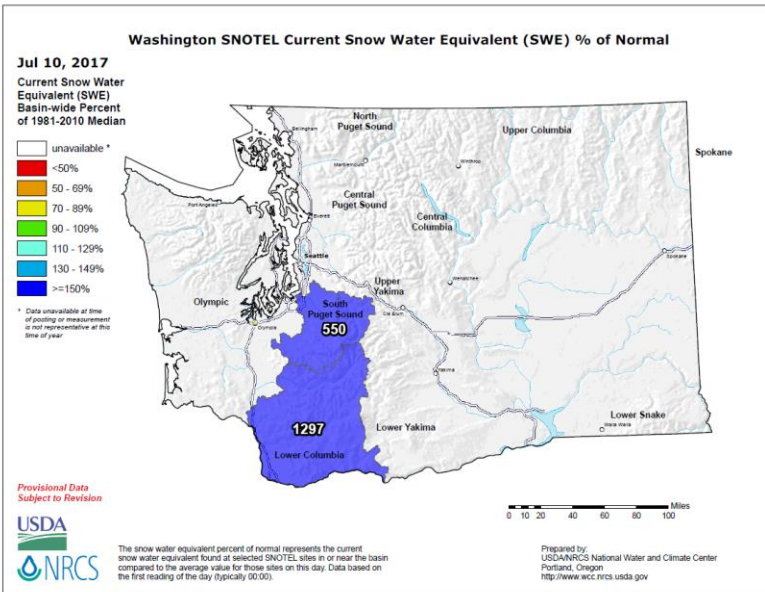
Both the North Rainier and South Rainier elk herds are partially contained in District 11, providing an opportunity to harvest elk as they migrate out of Mount Rainier high country and follow river drainages to low elevations during the hunting season. Waterfowl hunting on Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge, off Anderson Island (GMU 655), and on inland lakes in the district are some of the best opportunities in the south Puget Sound region.

Hunters should be aware of firearm restrictions in certain localities of Pierce and Thurston counties. Maps of Pierce County firearm restriction areas can be seen on the Pierce County website's [Public GIS tool](#). The county's website also has information on firearm [regulations](#). Thurston County's website provides [maps of no-shooting and controlled shooting zones](#).



Map depicting the six District 11 Game Management Units and surrounding units in neighboring districts (400s for Region 4 and 500s for Region 5).

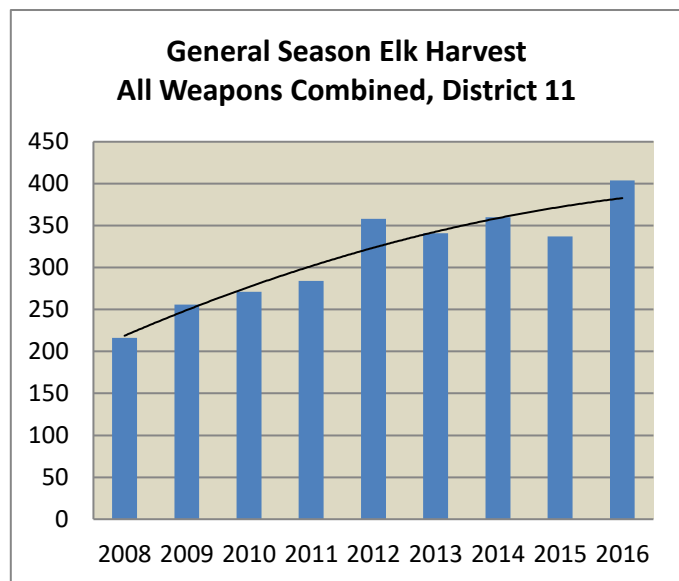
Like most of western Washington, District 11 was wetter and snowier from fall 2016 to spring 2017, with both good and bad effects. More snow fell in western Washington in the 2016-17 winter, especially in GMUs 653, 654, and 667, which likely increased over-winter mortality for deer and elk. However, the warmer and wetter spring in 2017 resulted in early vegetation green-up providing abundant forage for large and small game species that survived. In general, the conditions favor a good hunting season in 2017-18.



Map depicting the snowpack conditions from south Puget Sound to Columbia River as percent of normal as of July 2017 (NRCS 2017).

ELK

Both the North Rainier and South Rainier elk herds are partially contained in District 11, providing ample opportunity to harvest elk. Elk availability should continue to increase in all GMUs as both the North and South Rainier elk herds continue to recover, having met recovery goals over the past 15 years. Antlerless restrictions, winter elk habitat closures, and permit hunt restrictions in GMU 653 continue to benefit herd recovery in that unit. Hunters report a quality hunting experience and quality bulls for those fortunate enough to be drawn for the GMU 653 bull only permit hunt.



The larger portion of each elk herd migrates down from high alpine meadows in Mount Rainier National Park to lowland winter range. Public lands and private commercial timberlands bordering the park are good prospects. Hunters are encouraged to scout for elk leaving the

Mount Rainier National Park and following the Carbon River northwards into the Clearwater Wilderness Area and the White River into the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. Forested areas off USFS Roads 71, 73, and 74 and Bullion and Big Crow Basins east of Crystal Mountain Ski Resort (outside ski boundaries once ski season officially opens) offer good opportunity for high-elevation, rugged elk hunting with plenty of robust elk. The U.S. Forest Service, which permits the ski resort, wants to remind hunters that service roads built and maintained by Crystal Mountain Ski Resort are not open to the public, but hunters may ask for permission from the ski resort to haul out a harvested animal.

The Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forests and University of Washington Charles Lathrop Pack Experimental and Demonstration Forest (Pack Forest) in GMU 654 are good prospects for deer or elk and can be accessed by boot, bike, or horse during the general deer or elk season. Vehicle access during the hunting season in Elbe Hills is allowed only for hunters having a disabled access permit (see the [WDFW website](#) for more information). UW Pack Forest managers caution hunters to be aware of students conducting research in the forest any time of the year. Maps of Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forest as well as other Washington Department of Natural Resource public lands in the South Puget Sound can be found on [DNR's webpage](#).

Sub-herds of the South Rainier elk herd continue to increase and expand on and around the Centralia Coal Mine and Skookumchuck Wildlife Area (GMU 667). Hunters are encouraged to scout the area from the [Skookumchuck Wildlife Area](#) south to the northern boundary of the Centralia Coal Mine (GMU 667). Hunting on the coal mine is only allowed under specialized permits, which require a mining escort (two senior and two disabled weekend permit hunts will be offered in 2017; 5 permits each; see WDFW hunting regulations). Limited elk can occasionally be found and hunted on the [West Rocky Prairie wildlife area unit](#) in south Thurston County (GMU 666), on Joint Base Lewis –McCord (JBLM) property in Pierce County (GMU 652; hunters must register to hunt on JBLM thru NW Adventure Center (253-967-8282 or 253-967-7744), and off Delphi Road SW in western Thurston County (GMU 666). Elk cannot be hunted on property owned by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) near 123rd Ave SW in the Black River refuge of GMU 666 (former Weeks Dairy).

Elk continue to increase on private farmlands and properties in GMUs 652 (around Graham, Buckley, and Enumclaw), GMU 667 (Yelm and Hanaford area), and GMU 666 (foothills of Capitol State Forest to Delphi Road SW and Waddell Creek Road SW). However, hunters must request permission to access private lands, and are encouraged to obtain permission weeks in advance of the season from the landowner (e.g. visit property and ask for permission). Elk Management Area 6013 in GMU 652 has been reduced in size to encompass primarily the Muckleshoot Indian Reservation with several new hunting restrictions implemented in 2015 aimed at conserving elk for tribal purposes on the reservation. In response to increasing elk and elk-associated damage off-reservation in Buckley and Enumclaw, Elk Area 6014 was expanded and provides a 3-point minimum or antlerless general modern firearm season as well as three

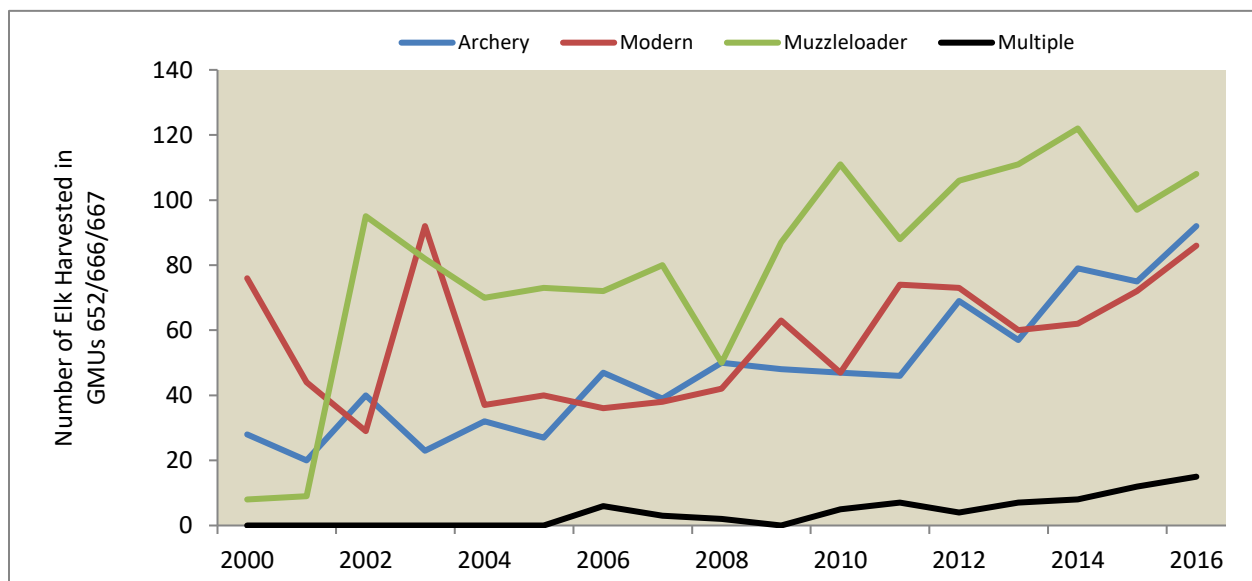
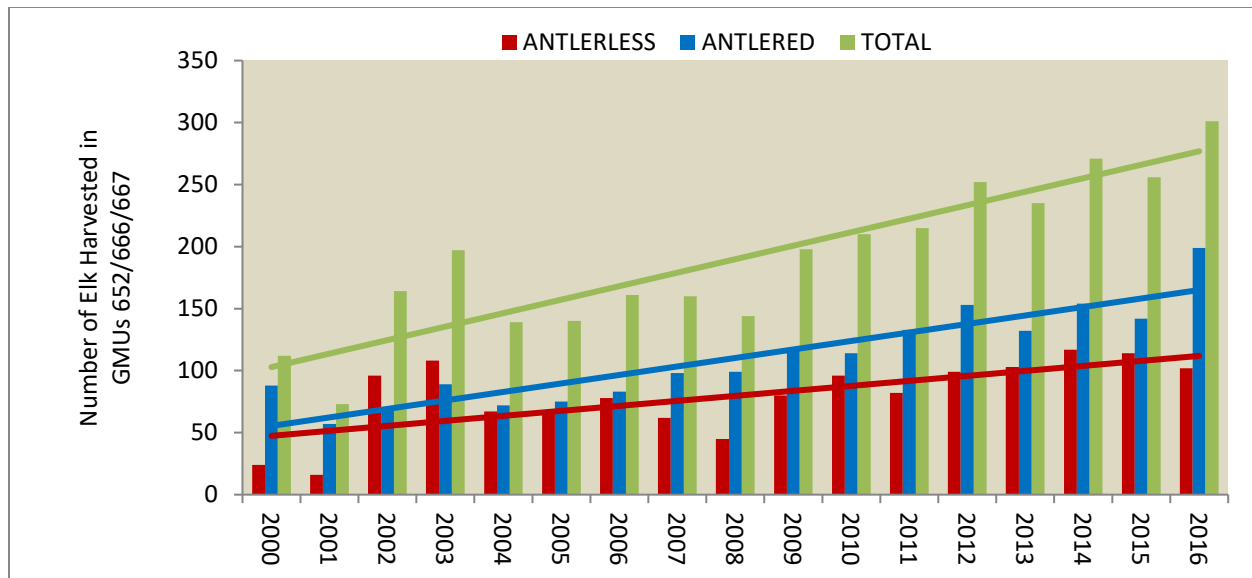
separate winter antlerless hunts allowing 10 permits per hunt. Elk Area 6014 is comprised primarily of agricultural lands, hobby farms, and ranch homes and supports approximately 150-200 total elk. Access to these properties is limited and hunters interested in these hunts are encouraged to obtain access prior to applying for these permits. The local WDFW conflict specialist may be able to assist with suggesting access sites.



Elk group on the Enumclaw Plateau in GMU 652, District 11.

Three antlerless elk permit hunts for controlling private property damage are also provided in the Hanaford Elk Area 6069, which provide five permits each (a November, December, and January hunt). Finally, general Region 6 Master Hunter Elk Permits (Hunt Choice #2719 in 2017) are also available. Hunters drawn are often sent to hunt on damage properties in both the Buckley/Enumclaw and Hanaford area and, as needed, elsewhere in the region. Overall, elk are plentiful in these damage areas, with access onto private property being the primary limitation.

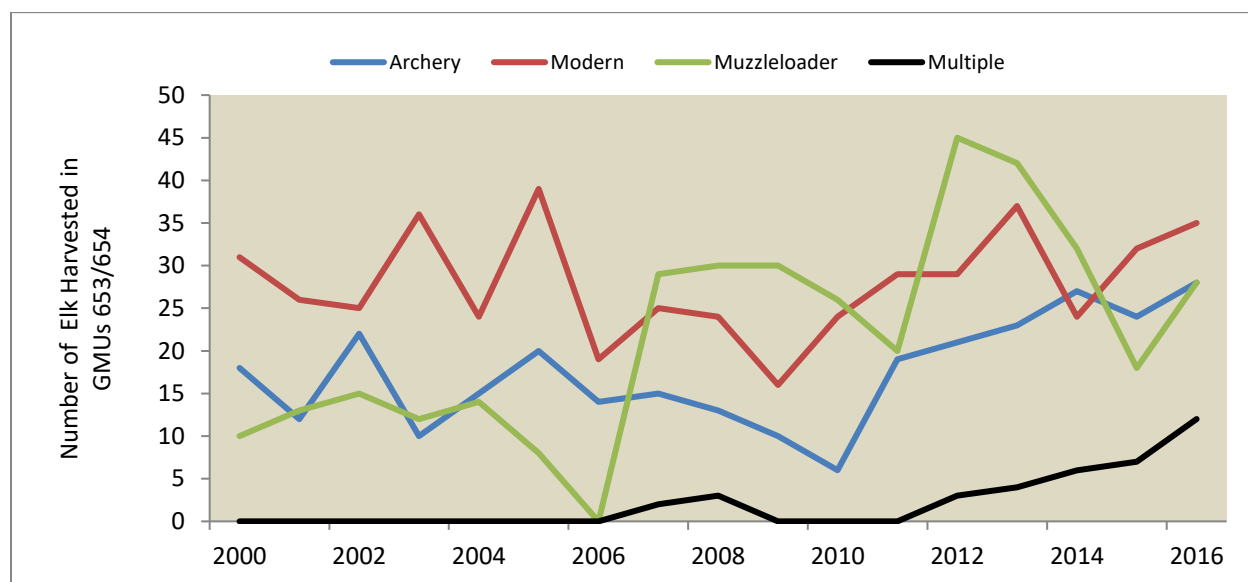
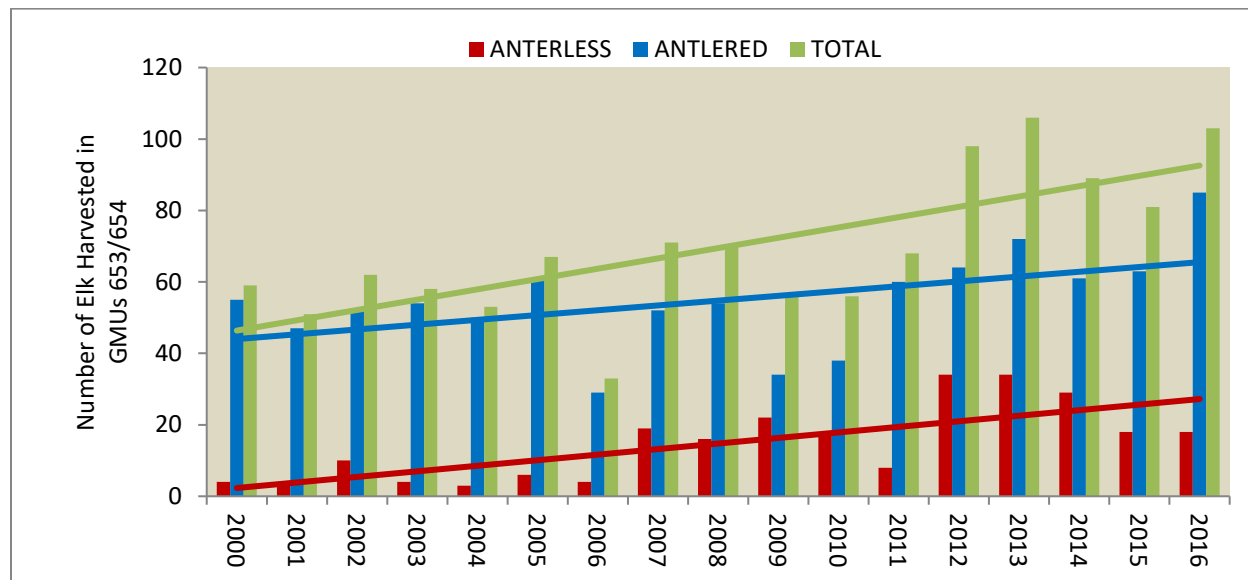
General season elk harvest has been gradually increasing over the past several years for all weapons within GMUs 652, 666, and 667 (the western district GMUs, and thus more influenced by urbanization). This makes for good prospects for harvesting an elk in those GMUs in 2017. Muzzleloaders experienced the highest harvest and, for many years, the highest increasing trend in harvest in those GMUs followed by archery and modern firearm.



Although the overall harvest trend has been gradually increasing in GMUs 653 and 654 since 2000, muzzleloader actually declined. This is partly reflected in changes in hunting regulation opportunity for muzzleloaders over the years but is balanced by greater opportunity in other units.

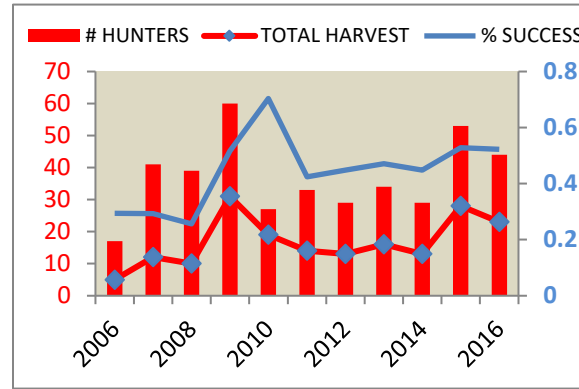
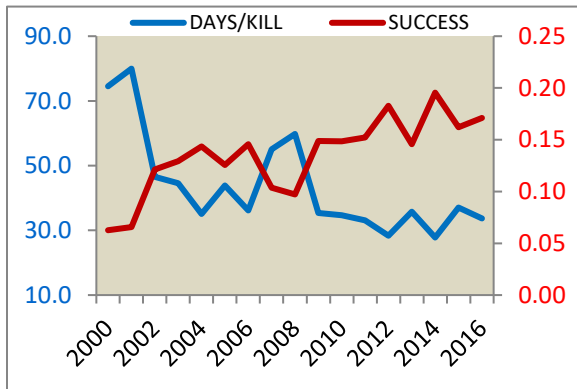
Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm in GMU 667 and Hancock Timber Resources Group managed forestland (Kapowsin Tree Farm in GMU 654, Buckley Block in GMU 653, and White River Tree Farms owned by Muckleshoot Indian Tribe and managed by Hancock in GMU 653) all support elk but require a vehicle access permit obtained by contacting the company directly (see

more information under Deer). Hunters can expect to continue seeing good numbers of elk on Hancock managed properties, in particular in GMUs 653 and 654, for those hunters who opt to buy the access permit.



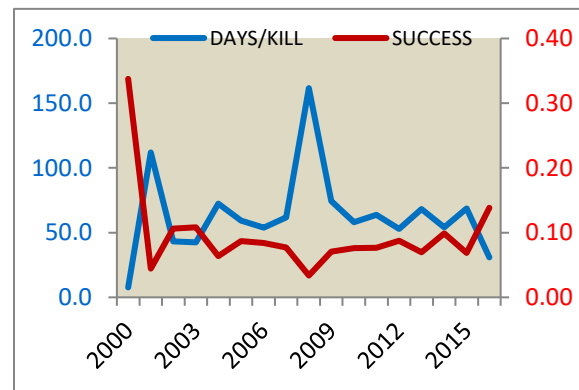
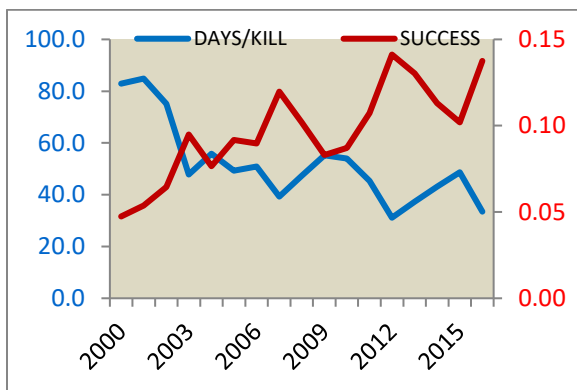
Hunter success as expressed by the number of days it took to harvest an animal is displayed in the following graphs for the five GMUs in District 11 supporting elk (GMU 655, Anderson Island, has no elk). Success has been generally increasing in most GMUs over the past 10 years. This is tracking elk population recovery in both the North Rainier and South Rainier elk herds. The exception is the Deschutes GMU 666, where access to hunting grounds is difficult due to the higher percentage of privately owned land. Regardless, success for hunters that have gained

private land access in that GMU has remained stable and thus prospects are good for those hunters obtaining access in 2017-18. Elk hunters are also generally less successful in GMU 667, which generally supports fewer elk than the northern GMUs. The bull-only permit hunt in GMU 653 has the highest success rate in the district, averaging 40 percent since it began in 2006. This is a rugged, high alpine hunt but worth the effort for those lucky enough to draw a permit.



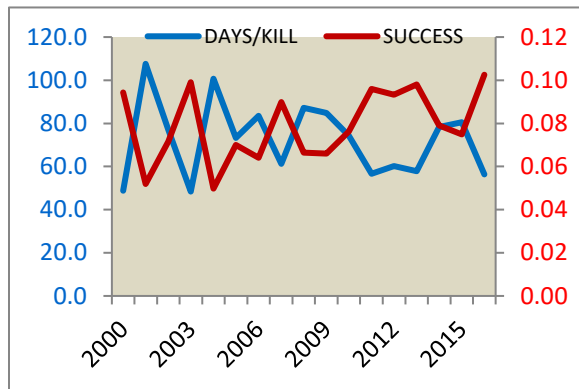
GMU 652 (all weapons)

GMU 653 (bull permit only hunt)



GMU 654 (all weapons)

GMU 666 (all weapons)



GMU 667 (all weapons)

ELK HOOF DISEASE (TREPONEME BACTERIA)

Since 2008, reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves have increased dramatically in southwest Washington, with sporadic observations in other areas west of the Cascade Range. While elk have long suffered from “hoof rot,” a relatively common livestock disease, the rapid spread and severity of this new affliction was something altogether different.

Scientific tests commissioned by WDFW in 2013 found that these abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause digital dermatitis in cattle, sheep and goats. Although this disease has plagued the dairy industry for decades, the treponeme bacteria had never before been documented in elk or any other wildlife species.

Since then, WDFW has continued to work with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations and others to develop management strategies for elk infected by treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD).

Several aspects of TAHD in elk are clear:

- **Vulnerability:** The disease appears to be highly infectious among elk, but there is no evidence that it affects humans. TAHD can affect any hoof in any elk, young or old, male or female.
- **Hooves only:** Tests show the disease is limited to animals’ hooves, and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and if hunters harvest, process and cook it practicing good hygiene, it is probably safe to eat.
- **No treatment:** Currently, there is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven options for treating it in the field. Similar diseases in livestock are treated by

cleaning and bandaging their hooves and giving them foot baths, but that is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

Counties with confirmed cases of TAHD

As of March 2016, WDFW had confirmed cases of elk afflicted with TAHD in Clark, Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Lewis, Pacific, Pierce, Skamania and Wahkiakum counties. In the year that followed a few additional cases were also documented in Thurston, Mason and King counties.

Since 2015, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has also confirmed TAHD in elk populations in both western and eastern Oregon.

How hunters can help

- **Leave hooves:** Scientists believe that treponeme bacteria are associated with moist soil and spread to new areas on the hooves of infected elk. For that reason, WDFW requires hunters to remove the hooves of any elk taken in affected areas and leave them onsite. During the 2017-18 hunting season, this rule applies to GMUs 407, 418, 437, 454, 501-564, 633, 636 and 642-699.
- **Report elk:** Hunters can help WDFW track TAHD by reporting observations of both affected and unaffected elk on the department's [online reporting form](#).
- **Clean shoes and tires:** Anyone who hikes or drives off-road in a known affected area can help minimize the risk of spreading the disease to new areas by removing all mud from their shoes and tires before leaving the area.

WDFW is currently studying the effects of the disease on Washington elk populations and the state Legislature approved \$1.5 million to support efforts by Washington State University to monitor and research the disease.

DEER

Black-tailed deer population surveys in District 11 are limited, as surveys are not done annually and, when they are done, have consisted of one survey done in the highest quality location (Vail Tree Farm). Commercial and state timberlands continue to provide the best opportunity for deer hunting. Hunters are encouraged to scout regenerating clear cuts. In particular, timberlands worthy of scouting for both deer and elk include the Vail Tree Farm (GMU 667), Hancock Timber Resources Group managed properties (Kapowsin Tree Farm in GMU 654, Buckley Block in GMU 653, and White River Tree Farms owned by Muckleshoot Indian Tribe and managed by Hancock in GMU 653), DNR's Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forests (GMUs 654) and DNR and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) managed lands (scattered across GMUs 653 and 654).



District Biologist Tirhi with successful deer hunter at Vail Tree Farm deer check station in the Skookumchuck Unit 667.

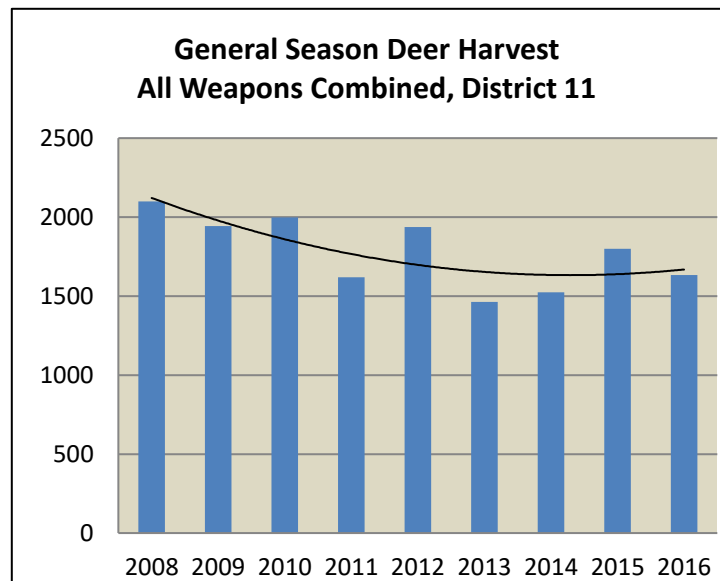
A limited access recreation program is in effect for Vail Tree Farm. Hunters are required by Weyerhaeuser to purchase an access permit in order to access Vail Tree Farm. Motorized and non-motorized permits allow access August 1 – July 23, and typically sell out well in advance of the hunting season. A maximum of 800 permits are annually provided for sale beginning in late May until December 31, or until sold out to access the tree farm (approximately 159,000 acres) at a cost of \$100 for a non-motorized permit and \$350 for motorized permit. All forestry operations continue during the permit season. Additional information can be found on the [Weyerhaeuser website](#) or by calling 866-636-6531. Hancock Timber Resources also requires an access permit for motorized access into the Kapowsin Timberlands, Eatonville Tree Farm (owned by Hancock), and White River Tree Farm (owned by Muckleshoot Indian Tribe but managed by Hancock). Access into Kapowsin and Eatonville by horseback, walking or bicycling is also allowed, but only if you have a motorized access permit as there is currently not a non-motorized access program for these areas. Non-motorized access is allowed through the non-motorized access program into the White River Forest. Permits allow access April 1, 2017 – March 30, 2018 with no access July 1-4 or during the elk bull season. Prices (total permits) for motorized permits for 2017-18 are as follows: **Kapowsin** = \$375 (1200), **Eatonville** = \$275 (300), and **White River** = \$225 (500). For more information on hunting/accessing and current access restrictions under permits on Hancock Timber Resource managed land, refer to their [website](#) or call 800-782-1493.



Opening day modern firearm season [SM Sgt S. Tkach III (Ret), 2015].

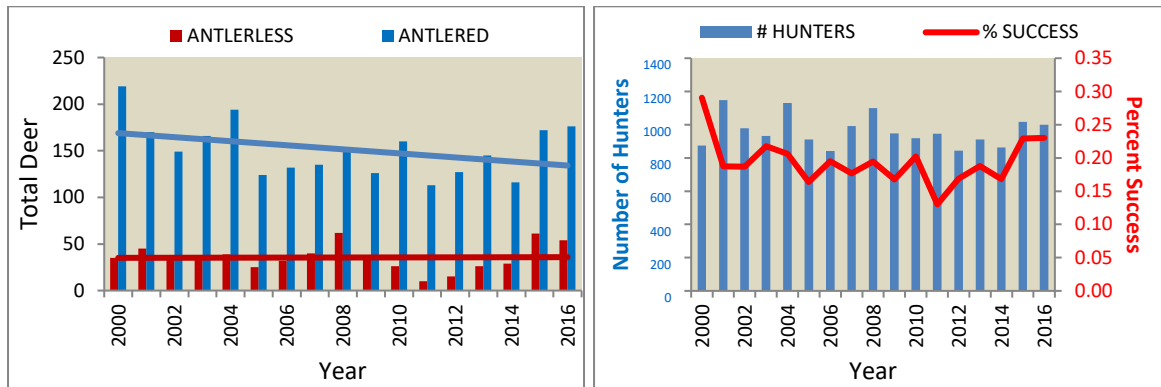
High elevation trophy black-tail hunting experiences can be found in the eastern portions of GMUs 653 and 654. They are accessed by USFS road and trail systems that lead to high mountain hunting areas, including portions of the Norse Peak, Clearwater, and Glacier View Wilderness Areas, and the Crystal Mountain Resort (see description under Elk).

Although deer harvest in District 11 declined slightly after 2008, it has remained fairly stable over the last six years across the district combined. Harvest regulations have altered somewhat in District 11 GMUs over the

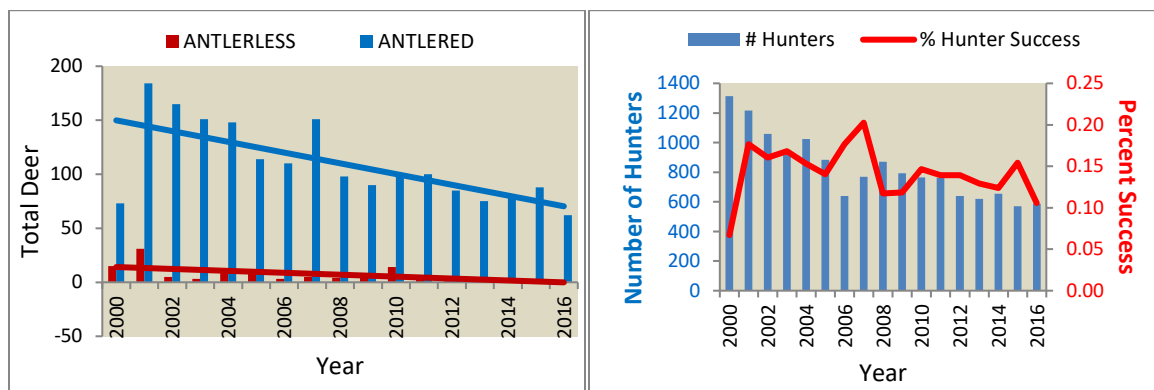


years, which play a role in harvest trends. Harvest in most GMUs in the district has remained stable over the past 10 years (note—declining trend in GMUs 653 and 667 caused by one year spikes in harvest only and do not reflect a trend). This includes GMU 667 remaining stable despite Weyerhaeuser’s transition to a permit only access system on the Vail Tree Farm, which composes the bulk of that unit’s harvest. Anderson Island was previously Deer Area 6014, having antlerless permit hunts only. The entire island became GMU 655 in 2013 and has since provided both general seasons (both sex) and antlerless permit hunts (55 permits in 2017-18). Ferry logistics and property access reduce the actual harvest despite plentiful deer on the island.

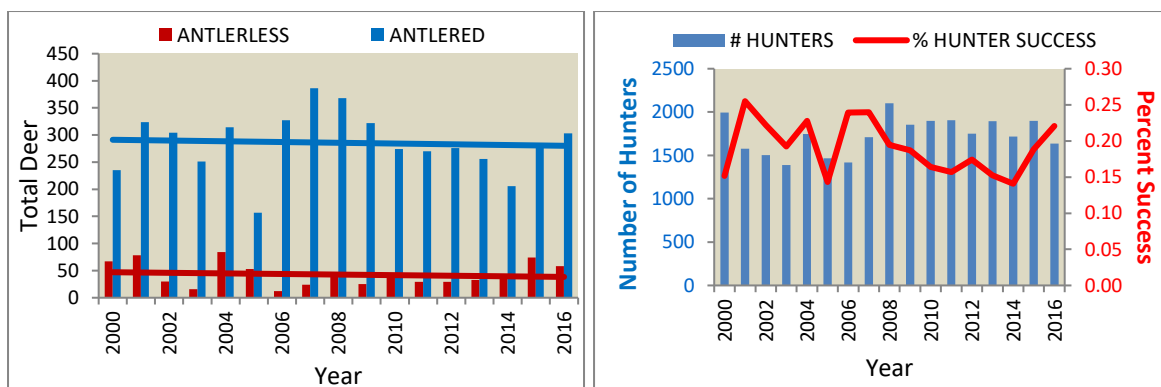
GMU 655, followed by GMU 667, continues to have the highest deer hunter success rates, while GMU 653 has the lowest of any District 11 GMUs.



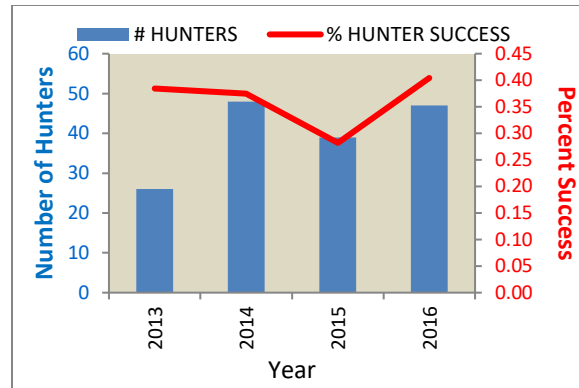
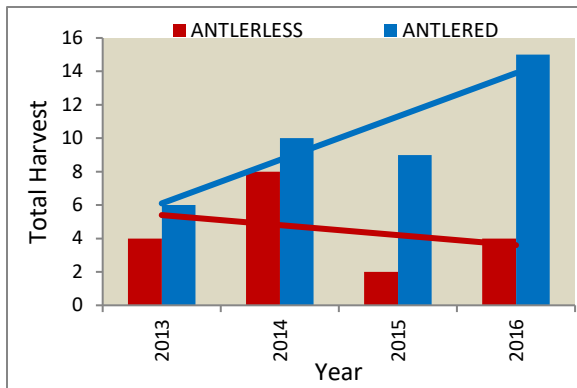
GMU 652 (Puyallup) Harvest, Number of Hunters, and Hunter Success Rates (all weapons)



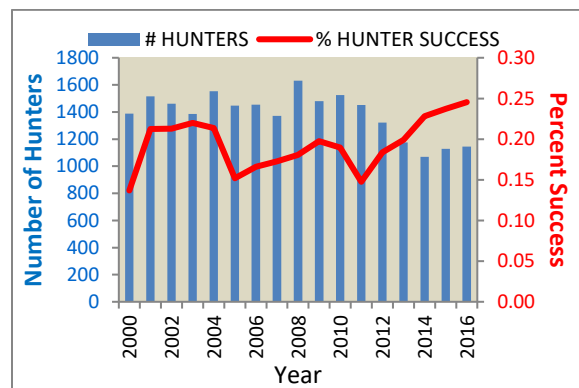
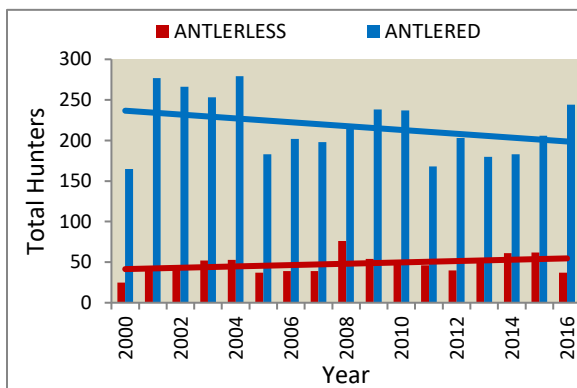
GMU 653 (White River) Harvest, Number of Hunters, and Hunter Success Rates (all weapons)



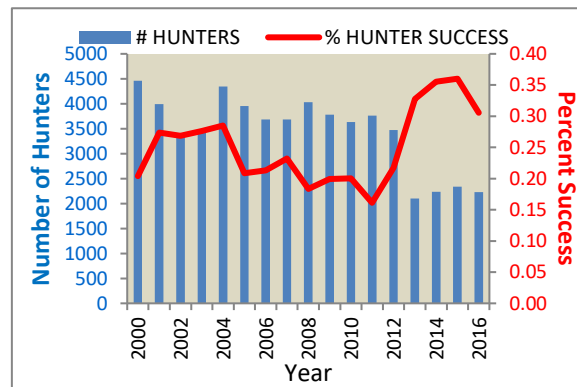
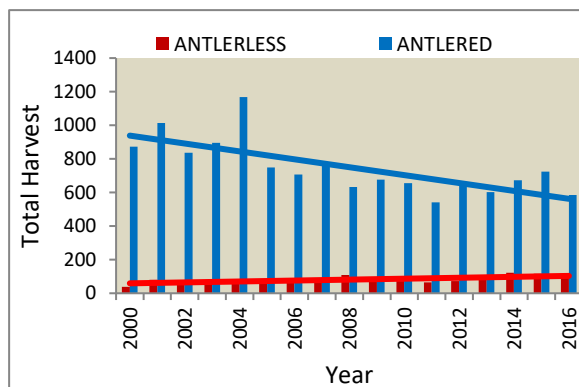
GMU 654 (Mashel) Harvest, Number of Hunters, and Hunter Success Rates (all weapons)



GMU 655 (Anderson Island) Harvest, Number of Hunters, and Hunter Success Rates (all weapons)



GMU 666 (Deschutes) Harvest, Number of Hunters, and Hunter Success Rates (all weapons)



GMU 667 (Skookumchuck) Harvest, Number of Hunters, and Hunter Success Rates (all weapons)

BEAR

District 11 comprises GMUs in two Black Bear Management Units (BBMUs): Puget Sound (GMU 652, 666, and 667) and South Cascades (GMU 653 and 654). Each of these BBMUs also

contains additional GMUs outside the boundaries of District 11. A bear season is not provided in GMU 655. There is opportunity within District 11 to hunt bear both in the fall general and spring special permit hunting seasons.

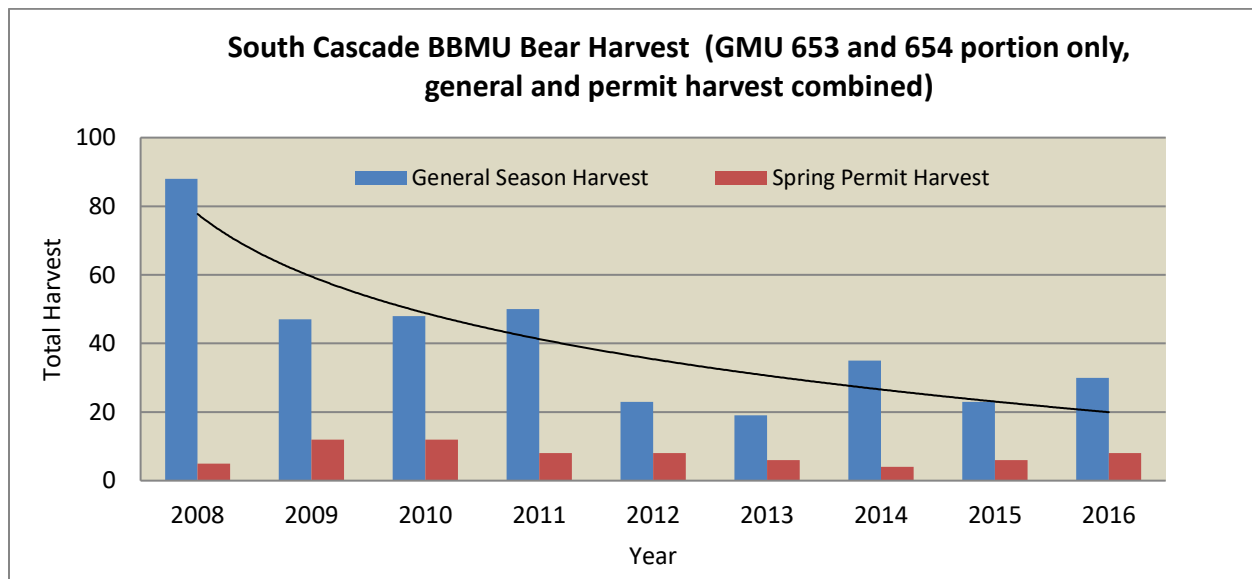
Commercial and state timberlands continue to provide the best availability for bear hunting. Hunters are encouraged to scout sign (scat and tree bark peeling) in regenerating timber stands. Vail Tree Farm (GMU 667), Hancock Timber Resources Group managed lands (Kapowsin Tree Farm in GMU 654 and Buckley and White River Tree Farms in GMU 653), Capitol State Forest (GMU 663), Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forests (GMU 654), and Joint Base Lewis McChord offer the best prospects for bear hunters in the district. (See comments earlier regarding access permit requirements for Weyerhaeuser and Hancock properties).

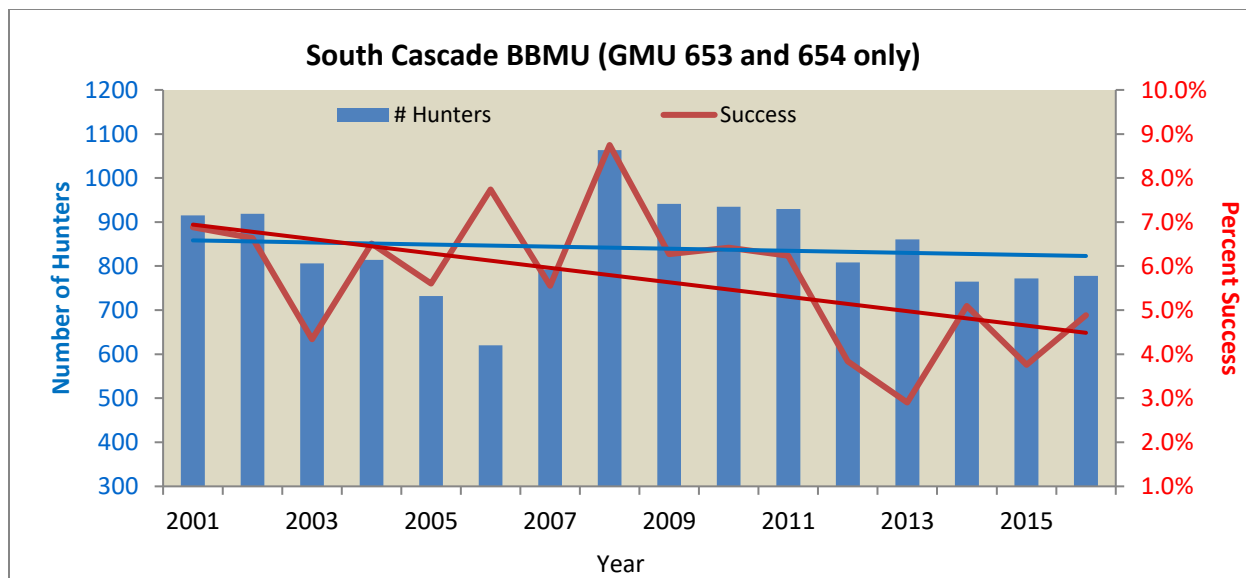


First Big Game Harvest (S. Holznagel 2014)

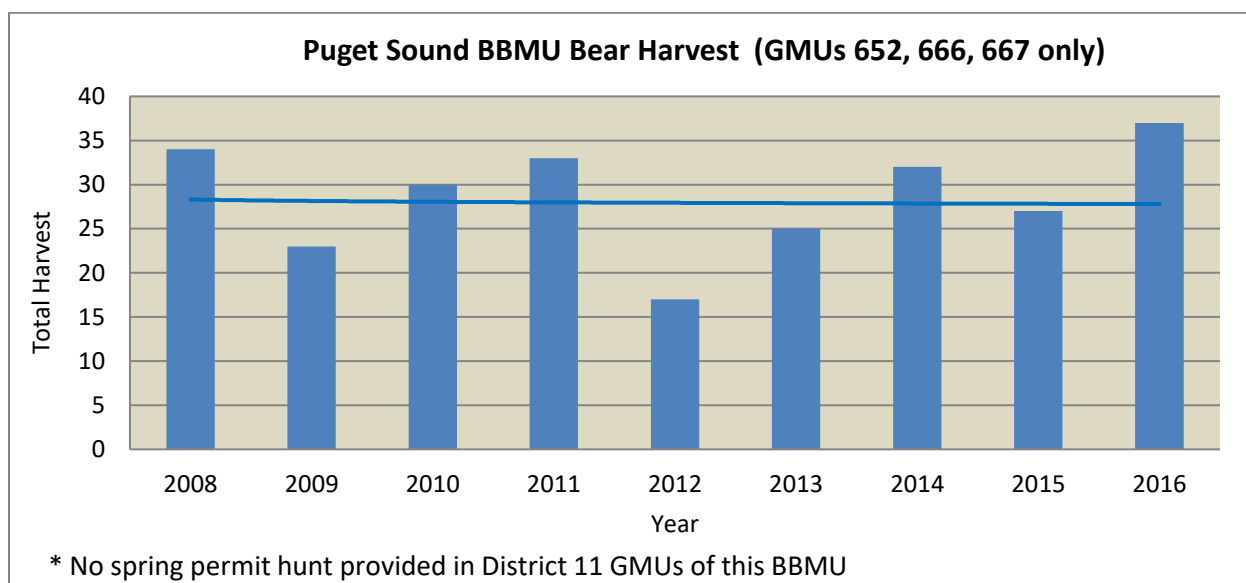
A spring black bear special permit season is provided on Hancock's Kapowsin Tree Farm in GMUs 653/654 within the South Cascades BBMU. A total of 150 permits for the April 15 to June 15 season will be available once again in 2018. Those successfully drawn for a hunt permit must also purchase a vehicle access permit from Hancock. A spring bear season only vehicle access permit is available from Hancock for all drawn permittees to hunt only the permit area at the cost of \$100 (see additional information regarding Hancock under Elk and Deer sections).

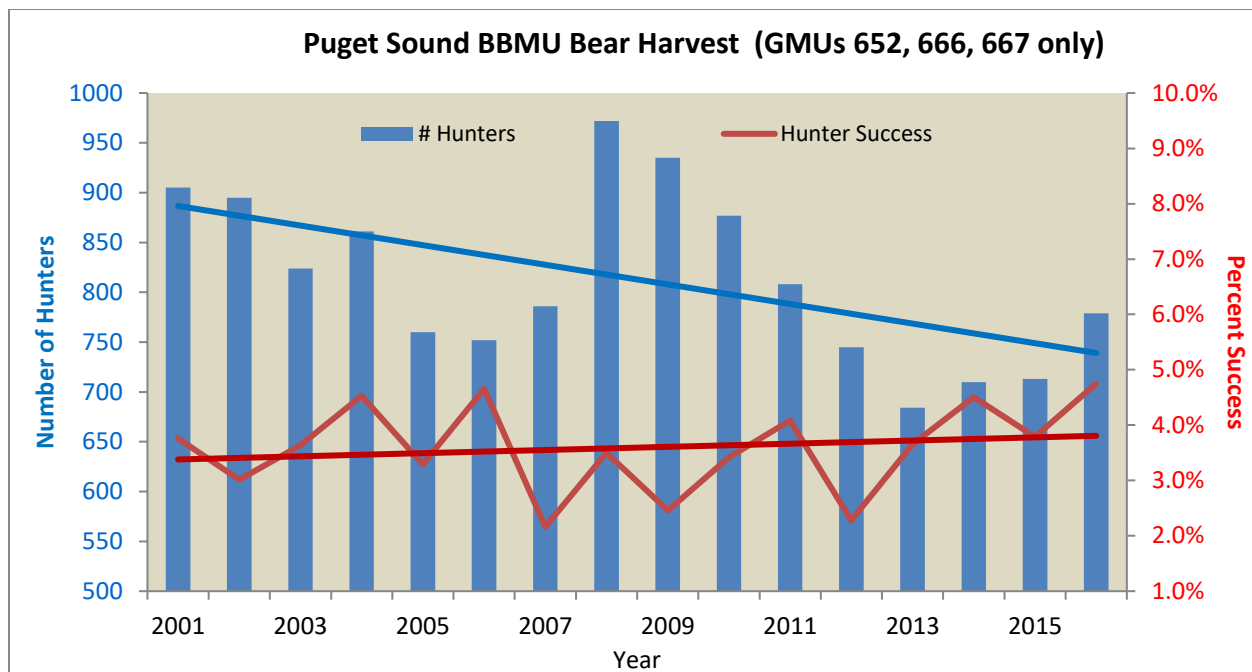
General season bear harvest trends in the District 11 portion of the South Cascades BBMU (e.g. GMUs 653 and 654) have been generally declining since 2008 but fairly stable over the past five years. A noticeable decline in harvest took place from 2008 to 2009 (despite season lengths and permits remaining the same) and again from 2011 to 2012 (partially due to a one-month reduction in spring hunting season length). Thirty bears were harvested in 2016 in the GMUs 653 and 654 portion combined of the South Cascades BBMU. Although the number of bear hunters in these combined GMUs has remained stable, hunter success rates have declined over last 15 years but stabilized over the last five. Prospects should remain the same to higher in the district due to wetter winter conditions combined with warmer spring resulting in excellent berry production for 2017.



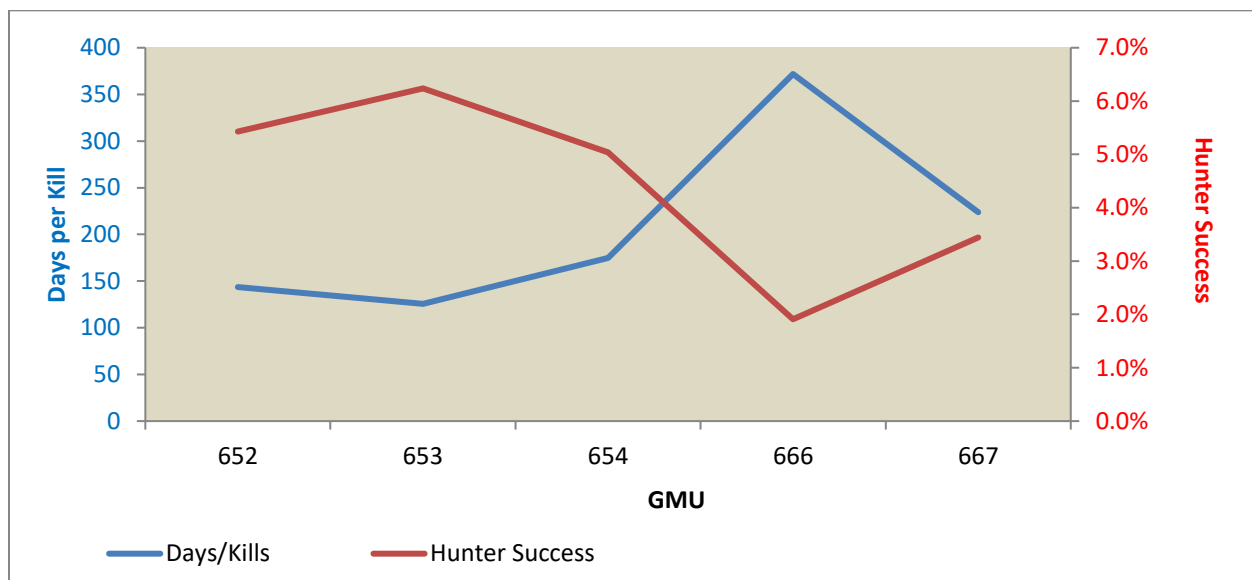


Bear harvest in the GMUs of the Puget Sound BBMU that are within District 11 (e.g. GMUs 652, 666, 667) has remained fairly stable over the past several years and has shown signs of improving since a low in 2012. Number of hunters hunting this BBMU has declined but those that remain have improving success rates. Both BBMUs in District 11 are hovering around a 4-5 percent success rate per hunter, which should continue into 2018.



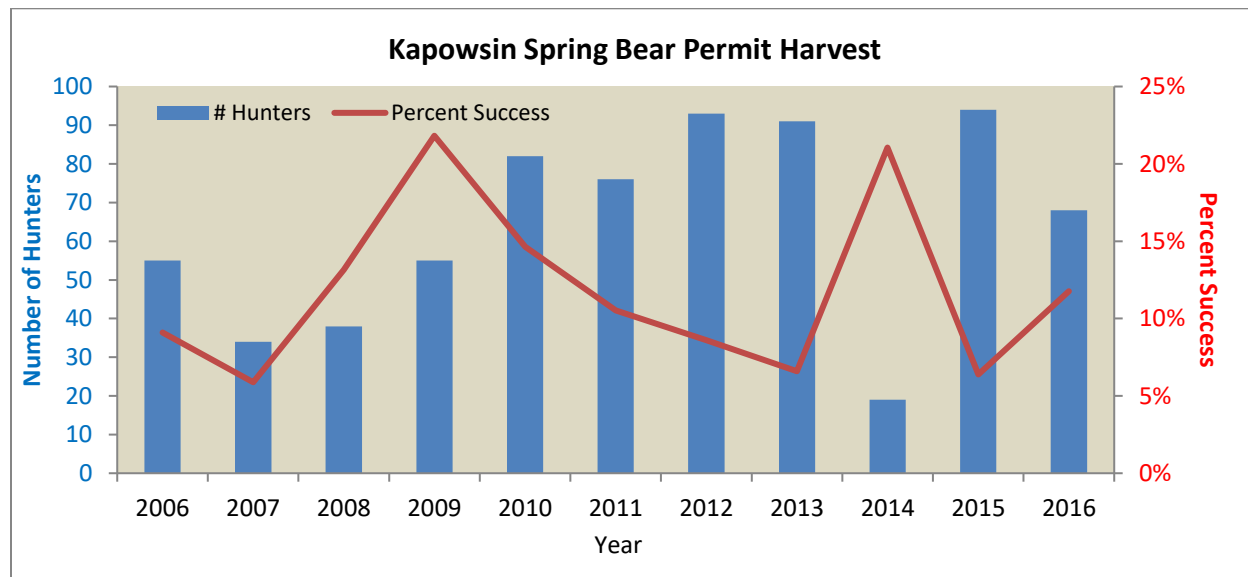


Comparing success rates of each GMU in District 11 for the fall general bear season over the past 16 years, GMU 653 and 652 have the highest success and thus the best chance of harvesting black bear in the district.



Sixty-eight hunters (of the 150 permits issued) participated in the 2016 Kapowsin spring permit hunt and successfully harvested eight black bear for a hunter success rate of 11.8 percent. This is significantly up from the 6.4 percent rate in 2015, but much lower than the cumulative statewide spring bear success rate of 27.5 percent. The 10-year average success rate for this hunt is 12

percent, which is in the lower half in terms of success of the 18 spring bear permit hunts offered statewide.



COUGAR

Cougars are widespread in the forest lands of District 11. Areas supporting high numbers of deer and elk also provide great opportunity for cougars. District 11 comprises three cougar population management units (CPMUs) made up of GMUs containing similar habitats and having similar cougar population objectives: 1) GMUs 652/666, 2) GMUs 653/654, and 3) GMU 667 (note: cougar hunting is not provided in GMU 655).

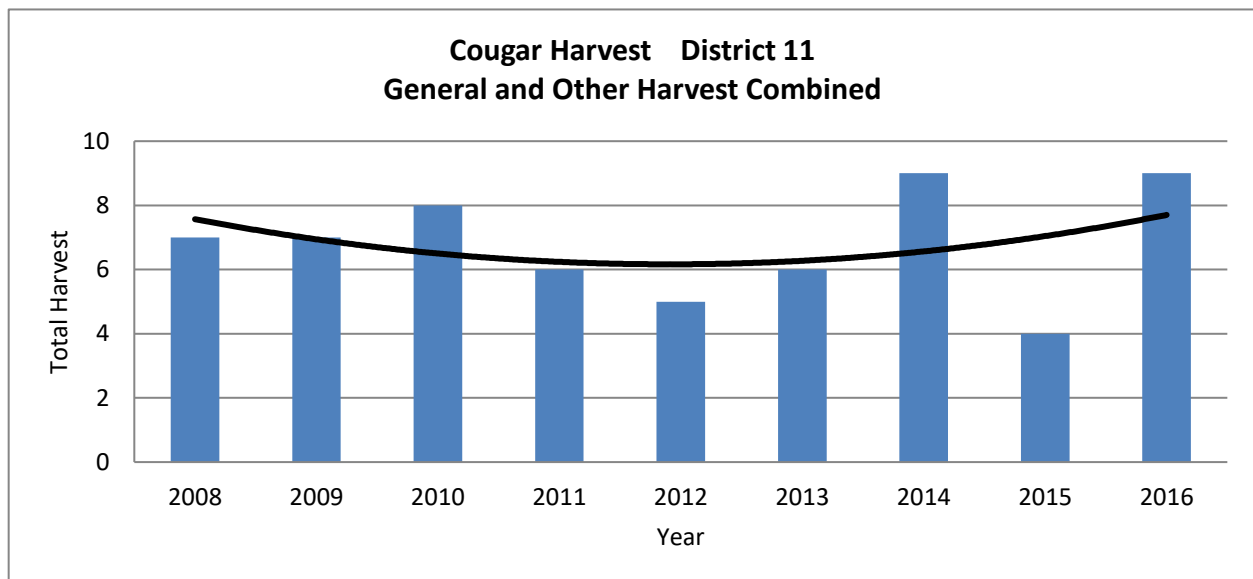
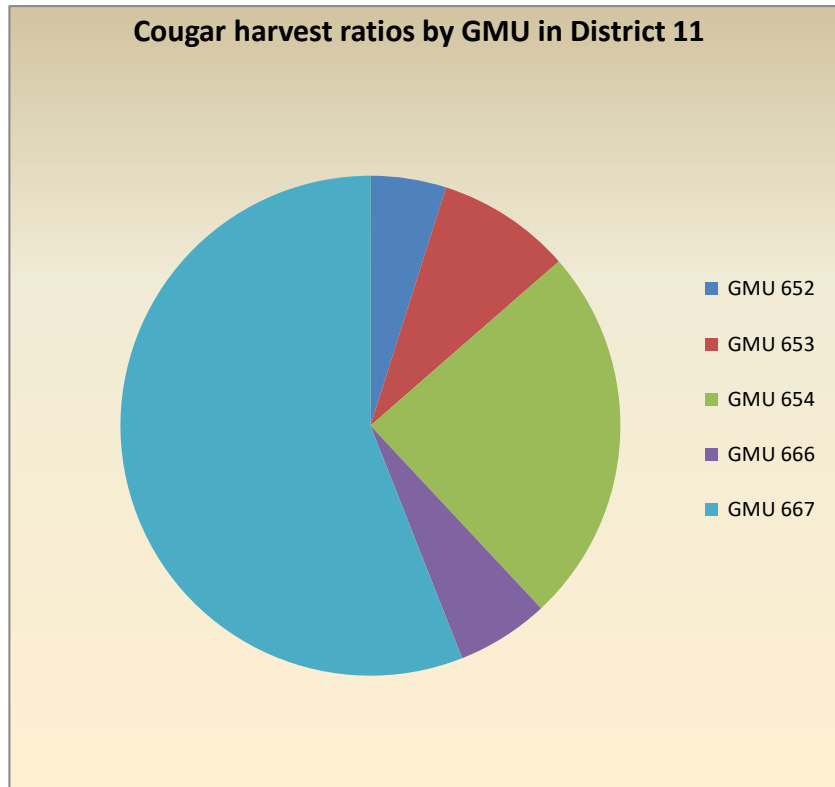
WDFW changed cougar hunting season design in 2012 with a liberalized season coupled with [harvest guidelines](#). Two general cougar seasons are offered:

- Early: Sept. 1 - Dec. 31, 2017
- Late: Jan. 1 - Apr. 30 2018 OR when the harvest guideline is reached, whichever occurs first.

Be aware that a 2018 cougar license/tag is required to hunt cougar in April 2018. GMUs 652 and 666 have no cougar harvest quota limit, GMUs 653 and 654 have a quota of five cougar (combined), and GMU 667 has a quota of three or four cougar – meaning at a harvest of three WDFW determines if other non-hunting forms of mortality have occurred and whether the GMU should be closed.

Cougar harvest in District 11 has been generally increasing over the past five years despite a low in 2015. A total of nine cougars were reported harvested in the district in 2015 (not including tribal). The Skookumchuck (GMU 667) annually provides the highest cougar harvest in the

district and one of the highest in western Washington. Thus, prospects for hunting cougar in the district are very good.



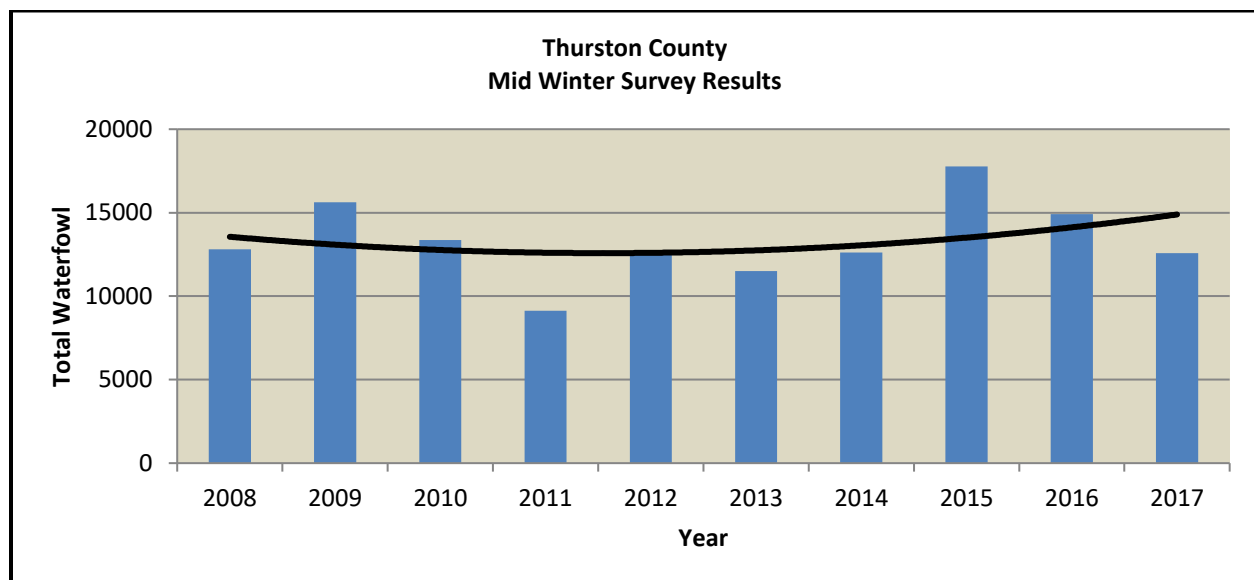
WATERFOWL

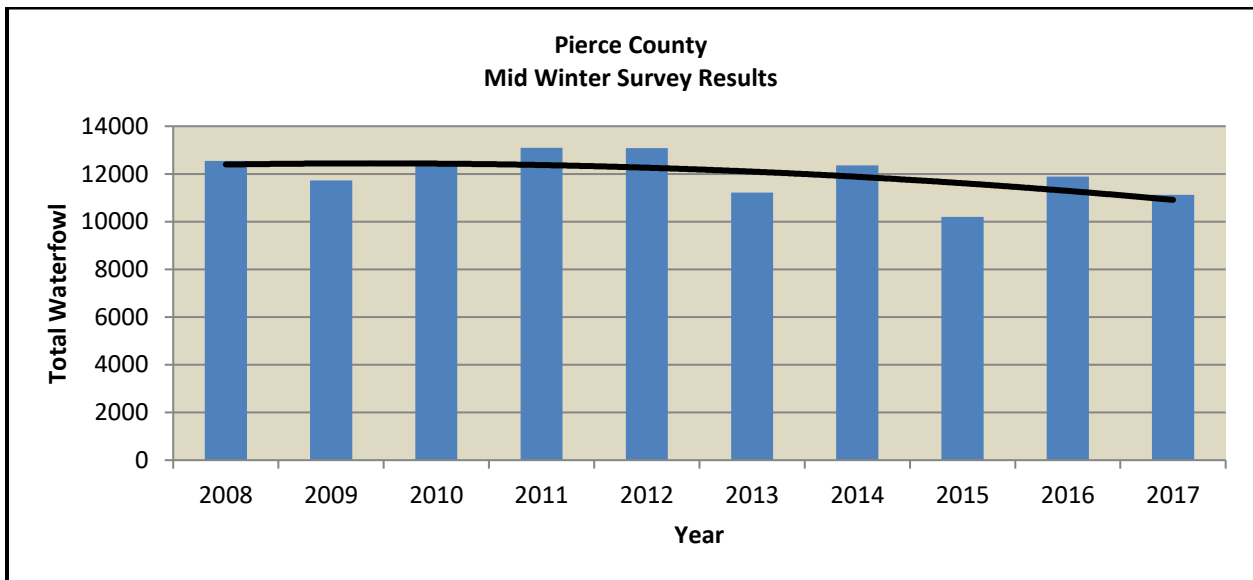
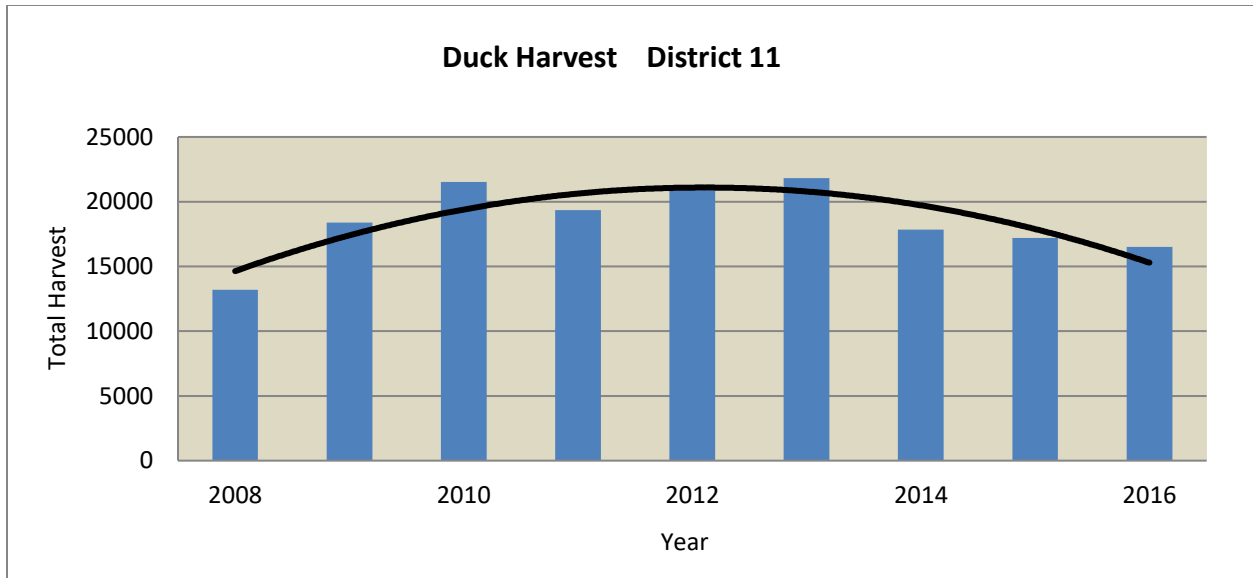
The majority of [Pacific Flyway](#) waterfowl are born on the prairies of the United States and Canada, primarily in Alaska, northwestern Canada, and other western states. According to the USFWS Waterfowl Population Status report for 2016, the western North American survey area habitat conditions were similar to or improved relative to 2015, with above-average breeding conditions. Ice and snow melt timing was very early in Alaska and the western Arctic, with snow and ice melt dates that were the earliest recorded in some areas, and normal to slightly early in the north-central and south-central Arctic. The early spring and the absence of flooding in important nesting areas likely aided waterfowl production. However, although total duck population estimates were higher across much of North America in 2016 compared to 2015, in Washington the total duck estimate was actually 37 percent lower than the 2015 estimate, and 30 percent below the long-term average (2010–2015). Thus prospects for successfully hunting waterfowl in Washington as compared to much of western North America and the remainder of the United States is much lower.

The total duck population (includes freshwater and saltwater species) as counted on traditional survey areas was 48.4 million breeding ducks, which is similar to the 2014 estimate of 49.2 and the 2015 estimate of 49.5 (which are 43 percent and 38 percent higher than the long-term averages, respectively). Waterfowl breeding population estimates are not released until after the release of this publication (mid-late August annually) but are expected to be similar or higher than recent years (and higher than the long-term average) due to limited flooding and above-average breeding conditions. Breeding [population trends](#) are available from USFWS for several species commonly found in District 11. For mallards only, Washington specific data is available. Those trends per species are as follows:

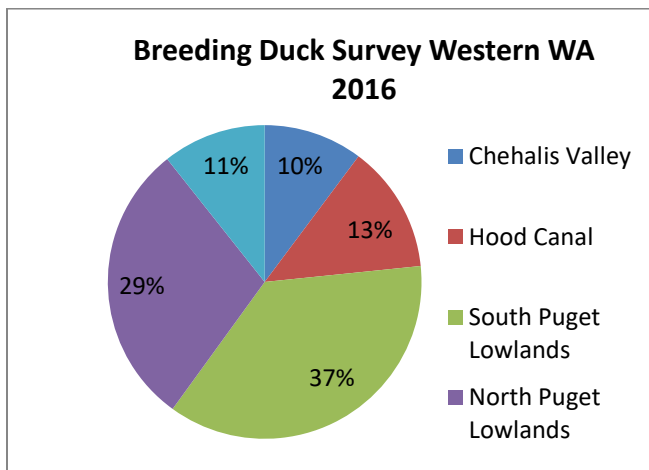
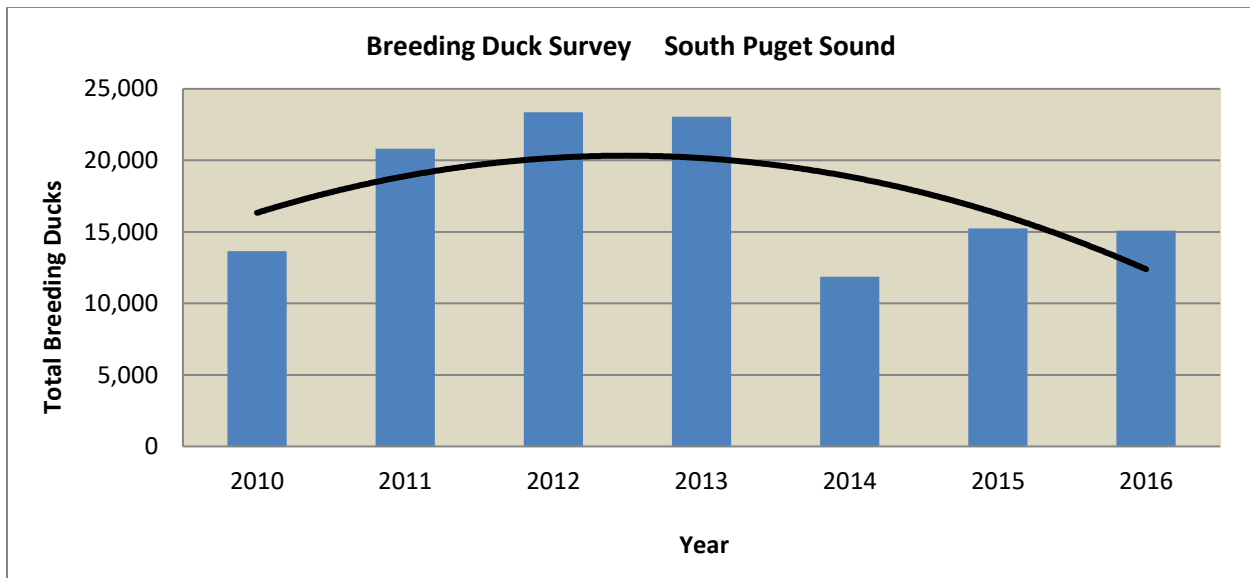
Species	Breeding Population Estimate Trend North America
Mallard	31 percent decline from 2015 to 2016 and 28 percent decline from long-term average in Washington specifically
Green-winged teal	5 percent increase from 2015 to 2016 and 104 percent above the long-term average
Gadwall	3 percent decline from 2015 to 2016 but 90 percent above the long-term average
American widgeon	12 percent increase from 2015 to 2016 and 31 percent above the long-term average
Northern shovelers	10 percent decline from 2015 to 2016 but 56 percent above the long-term average
Northern pintails	14 percent decline from 2015 to 2016 and 34 percent below the long-term average
Scaup (combined)	14 percent increase from 2015 to 2016 and equal to the long-term average

Duck harvest in District 11 has been declining slightly over the past nine years. Thurston County supports more waterfowl than Pierce County, primarily as a result of Nisqually Wildlife Refuge and other Puget Sound inlets. Mid-winter waterfowl counts declined slightly in Pierce County and increased slightly in Thurston County over the last 10 years. Note that Thurston County surveys were affected by heavy fog in 2015 and counts are likely higher than reported here, perhaps continuing that increasing trend. The best prospects for waterfowl hunters in District 11 are in Thurston County.

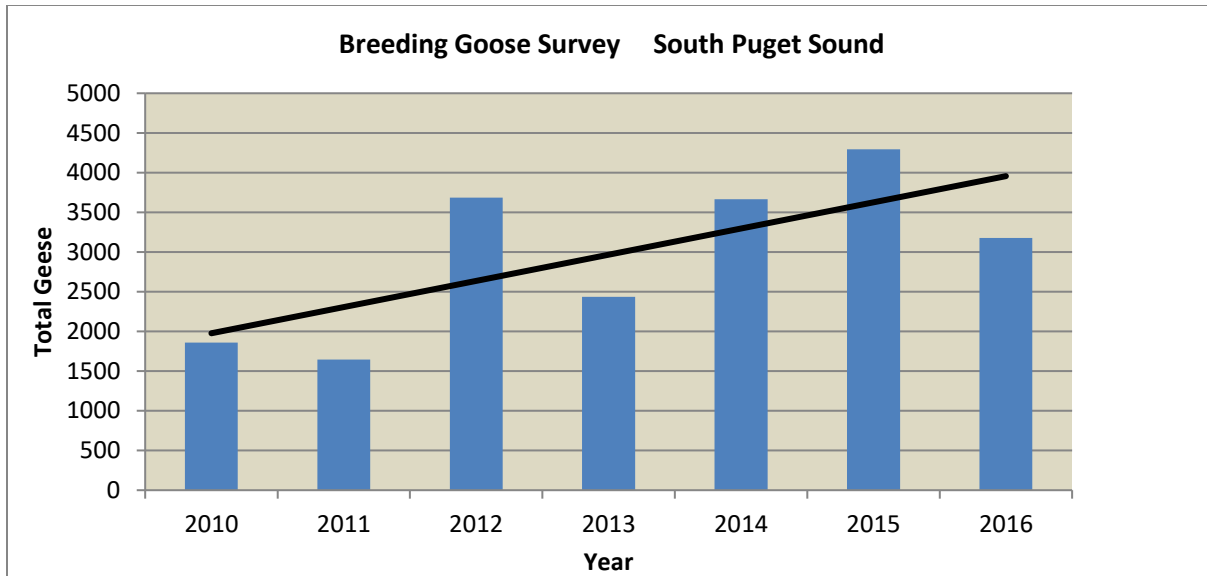




The south Puget Sound lowlands supported the highest percent of breeding ducks in western Washington according to the 2016 breeding duck surveys. Breeding season duck survey results remain low across western Washington compared to the seven-year average. This may be attributed to an earlier-than-normal spring migration and nest season in 2014, which resulted in a reduction in migratory waterfowl visible during the survey window rather than a true reduction in waterfowl. According to the WDFW waterfowl specialist, dry conditions during the 2015 breeding season likely resulted in lower productivity and ducks seen in 2016. The 2017 survey results and predictions were not available for the release of this report.



Goose breeding survey results continue to increase across the south Puget Sound since 2010 and despite a slight decrease in 2016, prospects for goose hunting in District 11 should remain good.



Hunting violations remain a concern on small water bodies in the district that are surrounded by housing. Hunters are urged to obey all hunting regulations at such sites to avoid potential future closures. All bodies of water are open for hunting unless located within a county Firearm Restriction Area (see Introduction). Rapjohn Lake in Pierce County has a Register to Hunt program and requires hunters to hunt from two established blinds. Registration for the blinds is on a first come basis and is established by parking in one of the two mandatory parking lots at the WDFW Rapjohn Lake Access Site.



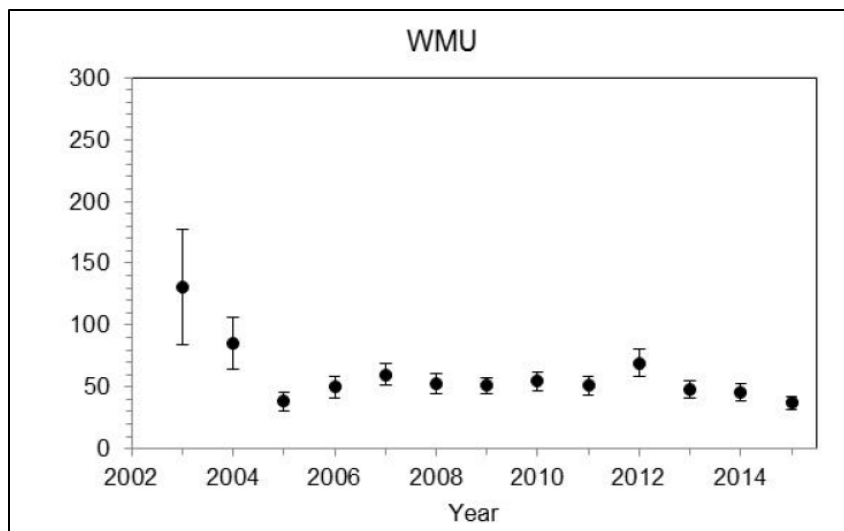
Young hunter with her collections in the blind (Photo by T. Frank, West Richland, WA)

The best waterfowl hunting areas in District 11 include [Nisqually Wildlife Refuge](#), Puget Sound marine inlets associated with western islands of Pierce County and Henderson, Budd, and Eld Inlets of Thurston County, and Centralia Mine in Lewis County. Flooded agricultural fields in the western half of the district can be good prospects for waterfowl hunting, but hunters must seek landowner access permission prior to hunting these sites. Note that a majority of the water bodies on Key Peninsula in Pierce County are within a Firearm Restriction Area, thus prohibiting waterfowl hunting. The Centralia Coal Mine has a limited, high quality hunt. Hunters are urged to contact TransAlta directly with questions regarding participation (360-736-9901). For information on hunting Nisqually Wildlife Refuge, go to the [refuge's website](#) or call (360) 753-9467.

MOURNING DOVE

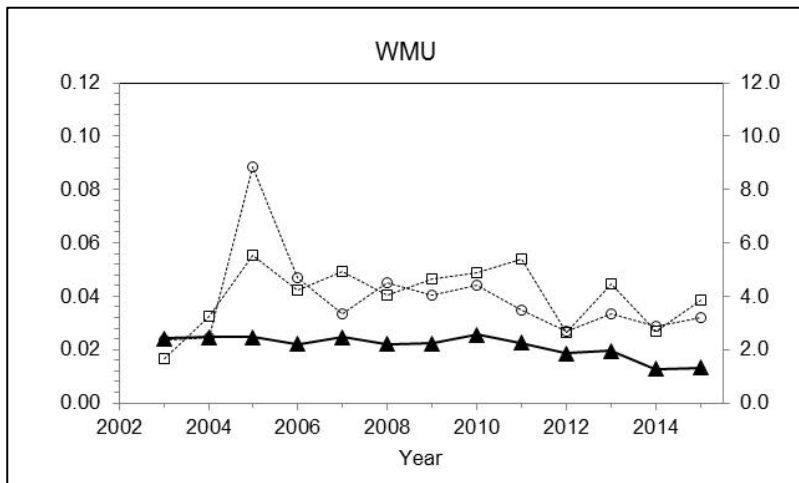
The Department uses the annual USFWS Mourning Dove Population Status Report to analyze trends in mourning dove populations. The report summarizes trends in the number of doves heard and seen per route from the all-bird Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), and provides absolute abundance estimates based on band recovery and harvest data. Harvest and hunter participation are estimated from the Migratory Bird Harvest Information Program (HIP). BBS data suggested that the abundance of mourning doves over the last 49 years decreased in the Western Management Units, which is composed of the seven western states, including Washington.

Estimates of absolute abundance declined again and remained very low in the Western Management Unit in 2015 (2016 data not yet available).



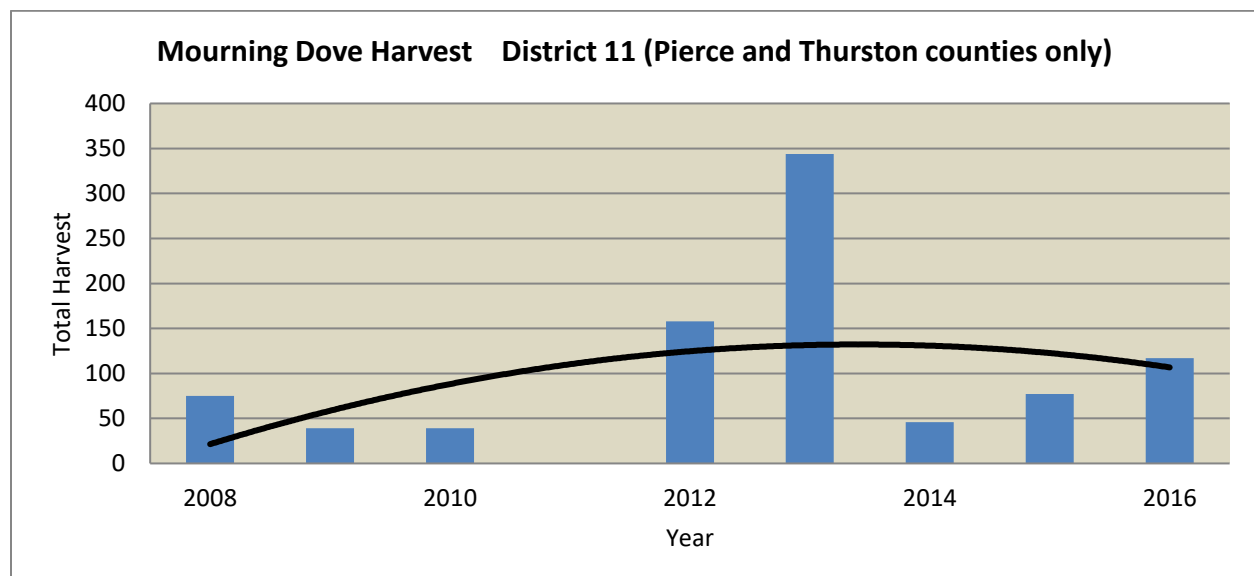
Estimates and 95 percent confidence intervals of mourning dove absolute abundance in the Western Management Units combined, 2003–2015. Estimates based on band recovery and harvest data.

Approximately 43,600 mourning doves were harvested by 4,200 active hunters in 2015 in Washington for an average of 10.3 doves per hunter (2016 data not yet available).



Estimated harvest (▲) and harvest rates of mourning dove in the Western Management Units combined, 2003–2015. Harvest rates presented separately for hatch-year (□) and after-hatch-year (○; USFWS 2016).

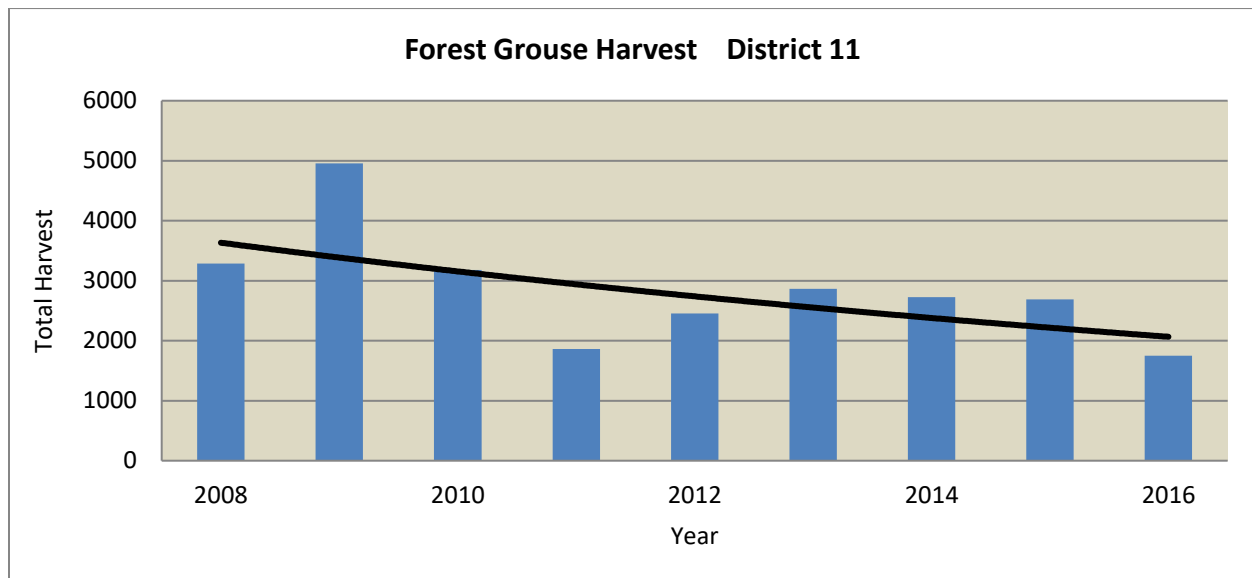
District 11 is not a prime dove hunting area in Washington and averages approximately 100 doves harvested per year. A significant increase in dove hunting was reported by hunters in the district in 2013 but declined after. Lewis County traditionally provides higher harvest numbers in the district with Thurston and Pierce counties far less. In 2016, harvest was 80, 90, and 27 for Lewis, Thurston, and Pierce counties, respectively. The best prospects for hunting dove in District 11 are in Lewis County.



FOREST GROUSE

Ruffed and sooty (formerly classified as blue) grouse are present throughout the public and private forest lands in District 11. The prospects for harvesting sooty grouse go up with increasing elevation. Hunters can expect the greatest success along logging roads, trails, and ridgelines above 2,000-3,000 feet and within Pacific silver fir and noble fir forest stands. The best hunting will be near fruiting shrub lands such as huckleberry, grouse whortleberry, elderberry, and other species. Logging roads are particularly good locations since they provide the sand that grouse need to eat for digestion and the dust grouse seek to discourage mites and other biting infestations. In particular, look for inaccessible or closed roads and walk behind gates (with permission by owner) to get the best chance of finding grouse.

Hunters targeting ruffed grouse should focus on elevations below 2,500 feet, particularly in riparian forest habitats, early seral forests (5-25 years old), and deciduous-conifer mixed forest types. Prime forest grouse hunting may be found on JBLM (GMU 652), Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forests (GMU 654), Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm (GMU 667), and Capitol State Forest (GMU 663). Forest grouse harvest continues to trend downward in District 11 over the past 9 years. Removing the 2009 spike in harvest, an average of 2,600 grouse are harvested annually in the district. The best prospects for hunting grouse in District 11 are in Lewis County, followed by Pierce and then Thurston counties. In 2016, harvest in Lewis County was 2,797, in Pierce County 1,095, and in Thurston County 654.



A hunter must purchase either a big game license or a small game license to hunt grouse. Grouse hunting is included in the purchase of any big game license purchase. Forest grouse season in District 11 runs September 1 to December 31, with a daily bag limit of four of any species (to

include not more than three of each species) and a possession limit of 12 (to include not more than nine of any one species).

PHEASANT

Western Washington does not support self-sustaining populations of pheasants primarily due to the wetter climate and lack of grain farming. Hunting pheasant on the west side of the state is dependent upon releases of pheasants in the fall. District 11 is fortunate to contain three of the 24 pheasant release sites in western Washington. For that reason, pheasant hunters continue to have great prospects for harvesting pheasant in this district. In addition, the pheasant production game farm for western Washington is adjacent to District 11. This means that pheasants are released directly from WDFW (versus the network of collaborators used across the state) and the shorter distance means less travel time, stress, and fatigue for the birds prior to release. According to our pheasant production manager, this equates to more consistency and stronger birds at release, which should improve hunting opportunity for District 11 hunters.



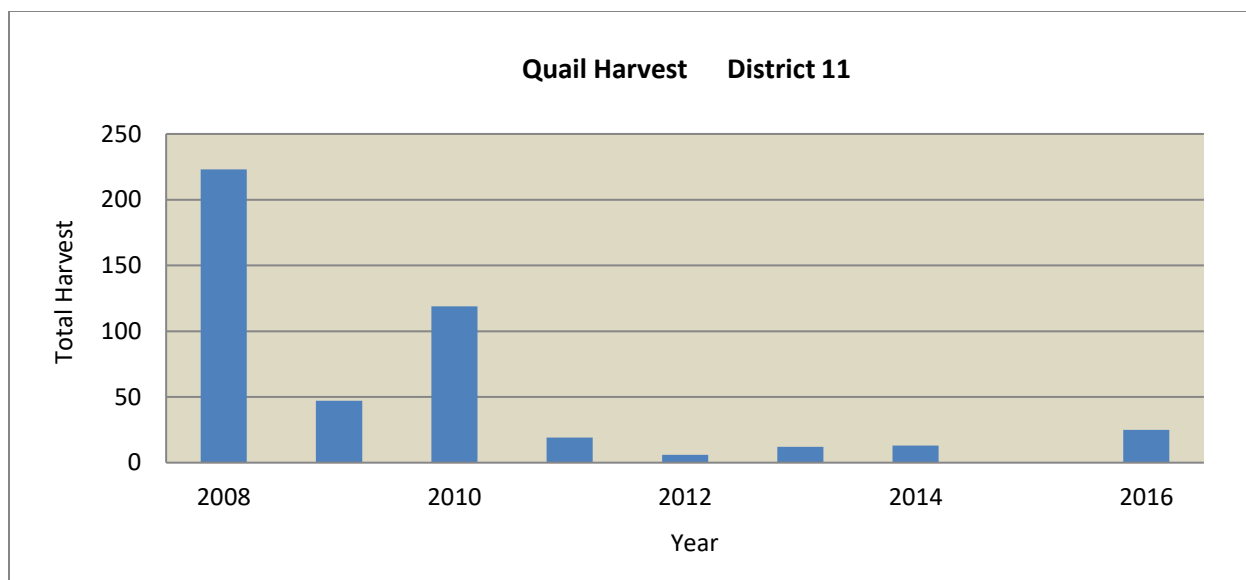
Game-farm produced pheasants will be released this fall on sites which are mapped on the [Go Hunt](#) website and in the [Western Washington pheasant program booklet](#). The release program utilizes state (Scatter Creek and Skookumchuck wildlife areas) and federal (JBLM) managed lands. There are special access processes in place for [JBLM](#), so please visit their website for information. Note that [non-toxic shot](#) is required on all pheasant release sites statewide. The general pheasant season is open from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., September 30 to November 30, 2017, with a daily bag limit of two (either sex) and a possession limit of 15 (either sex). An extended pheasant season is also provided in District 11 at the Skookumchuck and Scatter Creek wildlife areas and JBLM release sites from Dec. 1-15 under the same hours and daily/possession limits as general season. Pheasants are **not** released as part of the extended season. Hunters need a western Washington pheasant license to hunt pheasants. An overview of the Western Washington Pheasant Release Program, including a description and maps of all release sites, can be found on [WDFW's website](#).

Pheasant production in western Washington will be similar to last year with an estimated 36,000 pheasants to be released in 24 pheasant release areas in 2017. Be aware that total production could still be affected by seasonal temperature fluctuations and other mortalities in 2017 and

these are estimates only. Approximately 1,800 pheasants (5 percent of total production) will be released at the Skookumchuck Wildlife Area this season, with 50-75 birds released each day on Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays beginning September 16 through Thanksgiving Day morning. Approximately 3,700 pheasants (10 percent of total production) will be released at Scatter Creek Wildlife Area, with 120-135 birds released each day on Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays. Some areas of Scatter Creek are off limits to hunters due to endangered species recovery work so please obey all posted signs. Approximately 4,700 pheasants (11 percent of total production) will be released on JBLM. Military training dictates which fields will be open in any given week for both release and hunting access on JBLM. Hunters must register to hunt on JBLM through NW Adventure Center (253-967-8282 or 253-967-7744), at which time they will be informed about the pheasant hunting process including which fields are open for hunting.

QUAIL

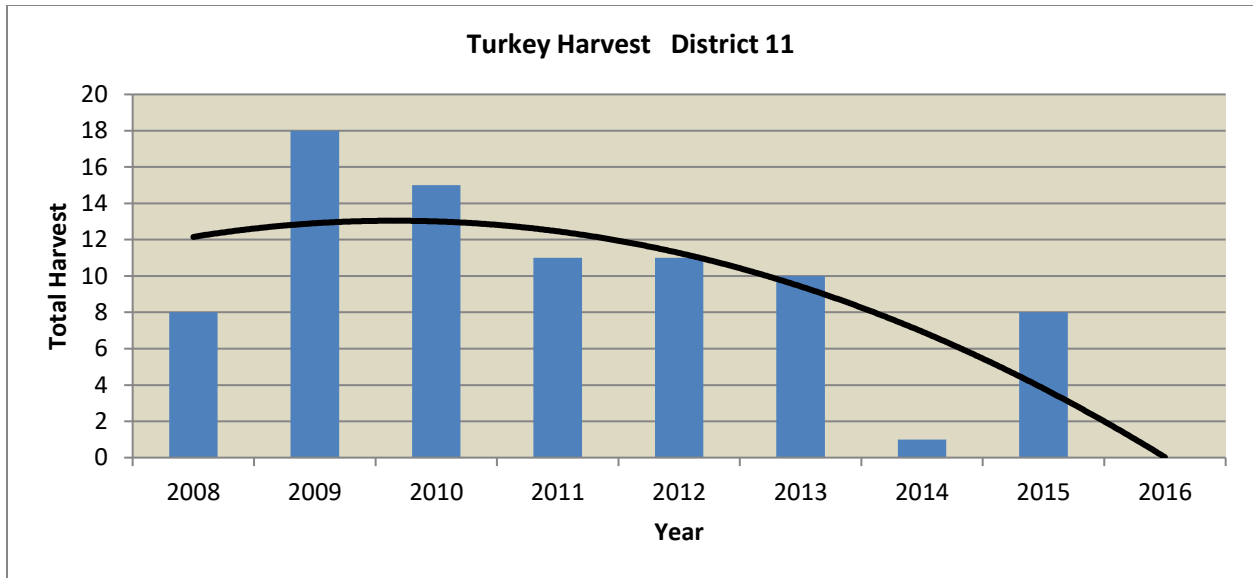
Quail are limited in District 11 as they are throughout western Washington. Quail harvest in District 11 has been trending downwards since a seven-year high in 2008. Harvest picked up slightly in 2016. Regardless of this downward trend, quail harvest in the district is not significantly lower than the other 10 counties in western Washington in which hunters hunt quail. California quail can be found in scattered locations throughout District 11, with the greatest opportunity in grasslands and woodlands of south and east Thurston County and northern Lewis County. Mountain quail are more prevalent in the brushy areas of the Key Peninsula in Pierce County, and southeast portions of Thurston County. Where private property access is limited, seek out state (DNR) and county forestland. Combined quail harvest in District 11 is traditionally highest in Lewis County, followed by Thurston and then Pierce. The California (valley) quail season in western Washington runs September 24 through November 30, with a daily mixed bag limit of 10 and possession mixed bag limit of 30. The mountain quail season runs September 24 through November 30, with a daily bag limit of two and possession limit of four.



TURKEY

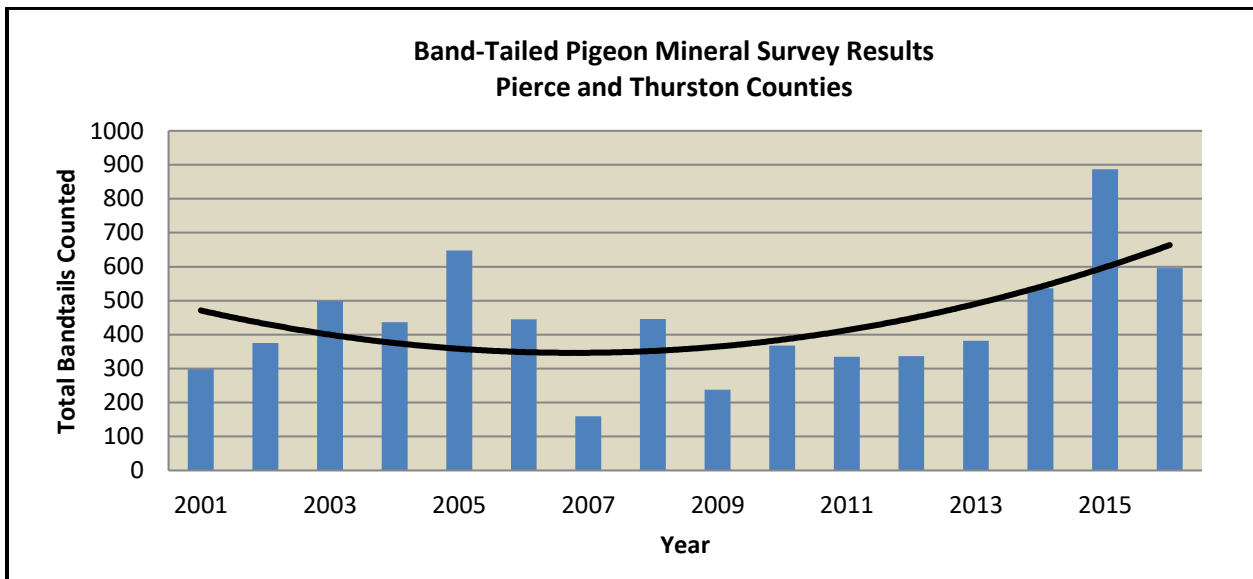
District 11 is not managed for wild turkeys and the species remains relatively rare. Regardless, there are huntable populations of the eastern sub-species of wild turkey in the district. No turkeys were reported harvested in District 11 in 2016. The average turkey harvest in District 11 for past nine years is nine turkeys per year.

WDFW receives occasional reports of individual or small groups of turkeys in Gig Harbor and Key Peninsula in Pierce County, Rochester in Thurston County, and along the Johnson Creek Corridor in Lewis County. However, the overall scarcity of turkeys in District 11 equates to extremely poor prospects for harvest. Annually, the majority of turkey harvest occurs in the Skookumchuck Unit (GMU 667), followed by a few in Deschutes (GMU 666) and Puyallup (GMU 652). The statewide spring turkey season runs April 15 through May 31 in any given year, with a youth-only hunt the first weekend of April. Male turkeys and turkeys with visible beards only are legal in western Washington with a season limit of one turkey (except two turkey limit in Klickitat County).

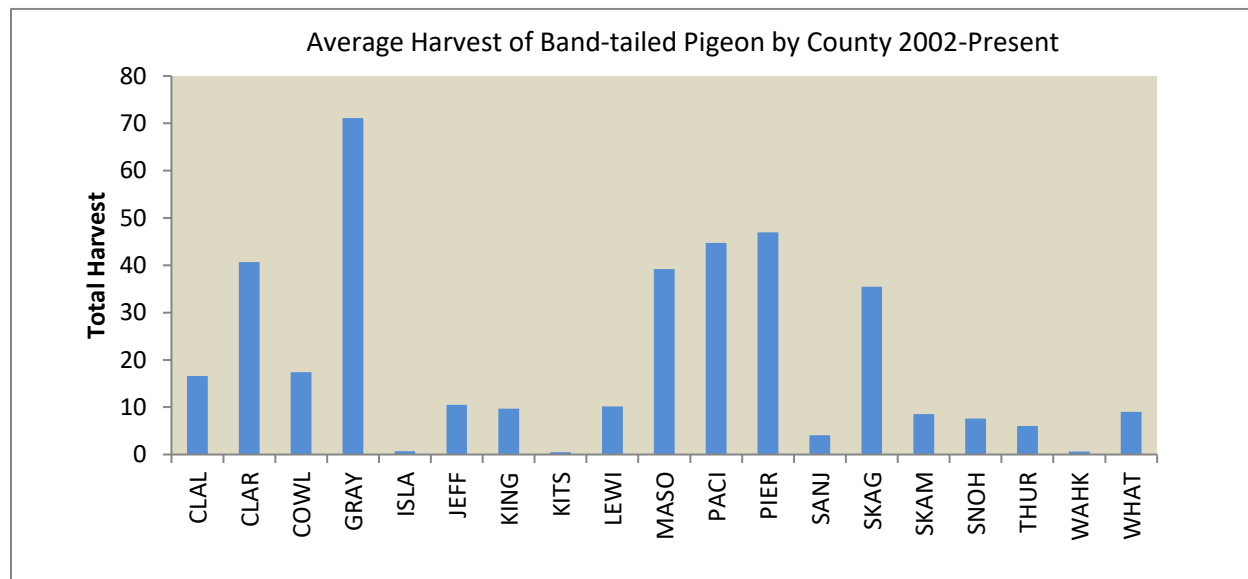
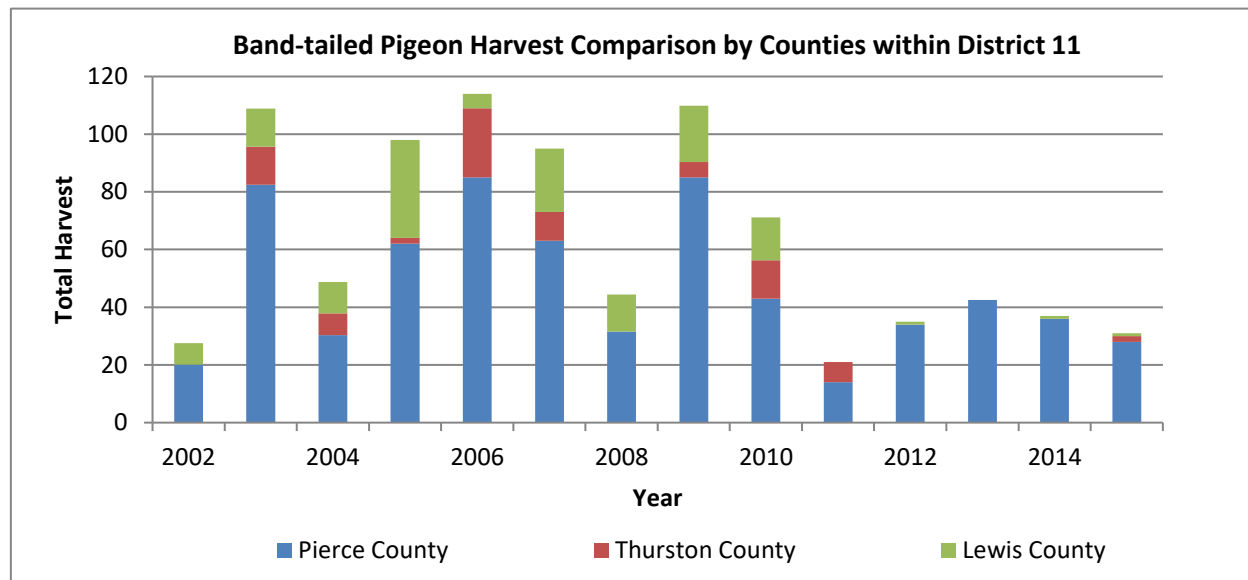


BAND-TAILED PIGEONS

Band-tailed pigeon estimates are based on mineral site surveys and have been trending upwards in the district since 2014 and rose sharply in 2015 due to a significant increase in those counted at the Mud Bay, Thurston County location. Pierce County in District 11 has the second highest average harvest in Washington (average harvest of 47 per year) and thus prospects for hunting band-tailed pigeons in the district are good.



Total harvest in Pierce County in 2015 was 28 pigeons, down slightly from 2014 (2016 reports not yet available). Two pigeons were harvested in Thurston County and only one in Lewis County, and they both rank low compared to other western counties. The best hunting locations for band-tailed pigeons in District 11 are Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge and Luhr Beach area (Pierce/Thurston county boundary), Mud Bay (Thurston County), Totten Inlet/Oyster Bay (Thurston County), and along marine shorelines of District 11.



COTTONTAIL RABBIT

District 11 provides some of the best cottontail rabbit hunting opportunities in western Washington. Rabbits are prolific in the shrub and grassland habitats found throughout Pierce and Thurston counties. Cottontail rabbit harvest in the district has been on the decline following a high in 2012. The average harvest since 2008 has been 260 cottontails harvested across the district annually. Pierce County has often had one of the highest harvests of all western Washington counties, but declined significantly in 2016. Thus, prospects for cottontail hunting in District 11, and Pierce County specifically, may be much lower than in the past if these trends continue.



Falconer J. Knudson with his newly banded peregrine falcon, Pierce County.

Success (harvest per unit effort) has declined in Pierce and Thurston counties since 2010 but increased in Lewis County. Note that some of this trend is likely due to lack of hunter participation in Lewis and Thurston counties.

